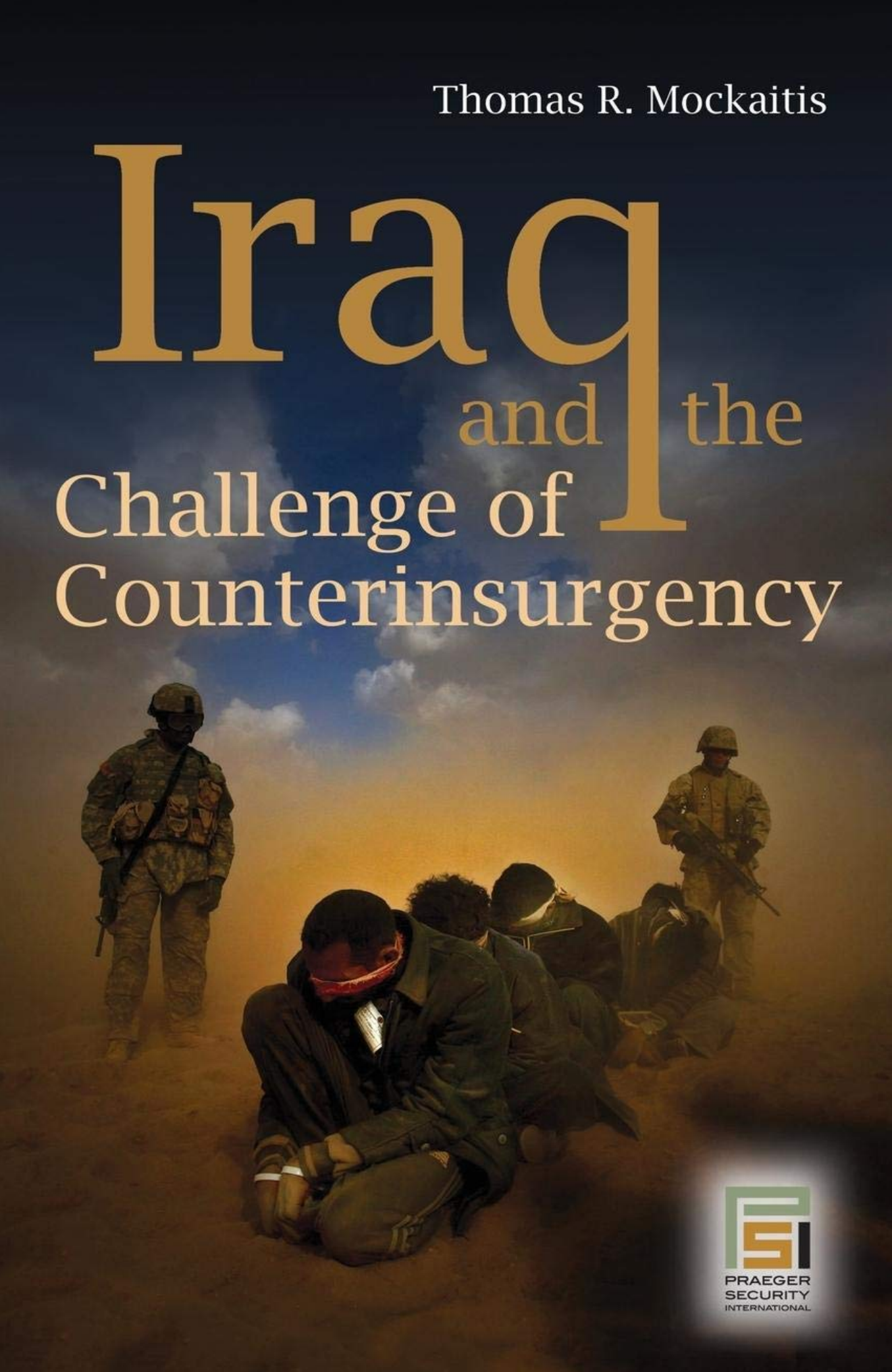
Thomas R. Mockaitis

# Iraq and the Challenge of Counterinsurgency



PRAEGER SECURITY INTERNATIONAL

# Iraq and the Challenge of Counterinsurgency

Thomas R. Mockaitis

The U.S. military in Iraq faces the most complex counterinsurgency campaign in its history and perhaps the history of modern warfare. At the outset, it confronted as many as 22 different domestic insurgent and foreign terrorist groups in an environment made more difficult by thousands of criminals released by Saddam Hussein. Over the past three years, the conflict has evolved with growing ethnic violence complicating an already difficult security situation. Even the most optimistic assessments predict a continued deployment of significant U.S. forces for at least five years for the country to be stabilized. It remains to be seen whether public opinion will support such a deployment.

Mockaitis situates the Iraq War in its broad historical and cultural context. He argues that failure to prepare for counterinsurgency in the decades following the end of the Vietnam War left the U.S. military ill equipped to handle irregular warfare in the streets of Baghdad. Lack of preparation and inadequate troop strength led American forces to adopt a conventional approach to unconventional war. Over-reliance on firepower combined with cultural insensitivity to alienate many Iraqis. During the first frustrating year of occupation, U.S. forces revised their approach, relearning lessons from past counterinsurgency campaigns and adapting them to the new situation. By the end of 2004, they had developed an effective strategy and tactics, but continued to be hampered by troop shortages, compounded by the unreliability of many Iraqi police and military units.

The Army's new doctrine, embodied in *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency,* outlines the correct approach to winning Iraq, Mockaitis argues. However, three years of desultory conflict amid ongoing revelations that the premises upon which the administration argued the need for invading Iraq may be false have eroded support for the war. The American armed forces may soon find themselves in the unfortunate situation of having found a formula for success at almost the same time the voters demand withdrawal.

*(continued on back flap)*

# IRAQ AND THE CHALLENGE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

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To Wayne and Grace Ross and To the Men and Women Serving in Iraq

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# PREFACE: OLD LESSONS FOR A NEW WAR

In the spring of 1987, I visited Sir Robert Thompson in Minehead on the Somerset coast of England. As part of my doctoral research on British counterinsurgency, I wanted to interview the architect of the British victory in Malaya and world-renowned expert on the subject. After we finished discussing Malaya, the conversation turned to Vietnam and the lessons it offered for American intervention in Central America (the Salvadoran civil war and Nicaraguan insurgency were active at the time).

"Don't go anywhere unless you plan to stay for 20 years," Thompson observed.

"We were in Vietnam for more than 20 years," I replied.

"No," he reflected. "You were in Vietnam for one year, and then did it over 20 times."

Thompson was right, of course. The United States never did develop a long-term strategy for victory in Southeast Asia. The generals expected the war to end quickly with an application of overwhelming force. When it did not end with one offensive or bombing campaign, they planned another and another, always hoping that the war would end before the next congressional election. The conduct of the Iraq War seems to be following a similar pattern.

"When was the Vietnam War finally lost?" I asked him.

"It could have been won at any time," he answered, "But you [the U.S.] could never have won it."

At the time, I dismissed Thompson's final remark as cynicism born of his bitter experience as head of the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam, where he felt the Americans ignored most of his advice. The Iraq War and 20 years of studying counterinsurgency have made me see a deeper wisdom in his conclusion. For historic, political, and cultural reasons, the United States does have enormous difficulty fighting unconventional wars. Desire to find out why motivated me to write this book.

Iraq has already spawned a minor publishing industry. Numerous monographs analyze (often in agonizing detail) the decision to go war.

These works range from sophisticated analyses of the decision to go to war, the ideological assumptions behind it, and the intelligence used to justify the decision, to diatribes against the administration. Other books, written largely by reporters, provide a worm's-eye view of operations in Iraq from the invasion through four years of occupation. These accounts contain a wealth of largely anecdotal evidence, but they often leave the reader wondering how much of it accurately depicts the war as a whole. As with so many unconventional conflicts, the Iraq war conforms to the five blind men and the elephant analogy: in the absence of a comprehensive view, what you touch forms your distorted perception of the whole animal. Journalist authors also tend, perhaps unwittingly, to focus primarily on the negative, which does sell more news stories.

This book takes a different approach. I do not challenge the basic premise of so many other works that the post-invasion phase of the war was badly planned and the early occupation horribly mismanaged. By virtually all accounts, Iraq is a textbook example of how *not* to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign. What I will do is examine why the campaign has unfolded as it has. This question cannot be answered simply by tolling off a litany of bad decisions, most made by civilians but some by soldiers as well, or by running through a list of culprits. Even mistakes occur within a context shaped by history. Only by examining the Iraq war within that historic, political, and cultural context can we begin to understand why it has been fought in a particular way and how American soldiers have struggled, with considerable success, to find a better approach.

As with all such projects, I have amassed a considerable debt of gratitude in writing this book. My wife of 27 years, Martha Ross-Mockaitis, served as confidant, enthusiastic supporter, some-time critic, and occasional proofreader. I would not have finished the book without her. DePaul University in general and the history department in particular have been supportive of my work, graciously rearranging my teaching schedule so that I could complete the manuscript. I also thank my colleagues at the Center for Civil-Military Relations of the Naval Postgraduate School who have contributed in ways large and small to my understanding of military matters. Finally, I wish to thank the many officers who shared with me their experience in the "Sandbox." Their remarks must, of course, remain unattributed.

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AKO | Army Knowledge Online |
| ARVN | Army of the Republic of Vietnam |
| CA | Civil Affairs |
| CAP | Combined Action Platoon (Vietnam) |
| CENTCOM | Central Command |
| CERP | Commanders Emergency Response Program |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| CLF | Coalition Land Forces |
| COIN | counterinsurgency |
| CORDS | Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (Vietnam) |
| CPA | Coalition Provisional Authority |
| ETA | Basque Fatherland and Liberty |
| *FM* | Field Manual |
| IED | improvised explosive device |
| IRA | Irish Republican Army |
| JSFTF | Joint Special Forces Task Force |
| JSOC | Joint Special Operations Command |
| KFOR | Kosovo Force |
| KLA | Kosovo Liberation Army |
| MAAG | Military Assistance Group (Vietnam) |
| MACV | Military Assistance Group Vietnam |
| MEF | Marine Expeditionary Force |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NSC | National Security Council |
| NSPD | National Security Presidential Directive |
| OHRA | Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid |
| OPLAN | Operations Plan |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| RPG | rocket propelled grenade |
| SEAL | Sea, Air, Land (U.S. Navy) |

| | |
|---|---|
| SOCOM | Special Operations Command |
| SOF | Special Operations Forces |
| UAR | United Arab Republic |
| UN | United Nations |
| WMD | Weapons of Mass Destruction |

# INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 2003, President George W. Bush landed an S-3B Viking jet on the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, which had been moved closer to the California coast to accommodate his visit. In a nationally televised speech to the assembled crew, he declared, "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended." Although the President fell just short of proclaiming the war over and admitted that much remained to be done in rebuilding the country, he went on to call the battle of Iraq "one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11, 2001."[1] Three and a half years later, three years longer than U.S. combat forces were even supposed to be in Iraq, the *Iraq Study Group Report* began with the sobering assessment that "the situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating."[2] Despite its propitious start with a lightening advance to Baghdad in which U.S. soldiers and Marines easily swept aside Iraqi forces, the war had turned into a desultory counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign lasting longer than U.S. participation in World War II with no end to hostilities in sight.

What had gone wrong? How had a war scheduled to last less than six months dragged on for over three years with the prospect of decisive victory seeming ever more remote? As public dissatisfaction with a campaign that produced nothing but a growing list of casualties and burgeoning budget deficits mounted, politicians, academics, and a whole cadre of retired generals lined up to offer explanations. The administration had accepted uncritically the assurance of Iraqi exiles like Ahmad Chalabi that grateful Iraqis would fill the streets to eagerly welcome their liberators and just as quickly pick up the reigns of government so that the Americans could go home. The force deployed to Iraq in 2003 had been too small to handle the arduous tasks of occupation, internal security, and rebuilding. Soldiers and Marines had done nothing to stop the lawlessness that wracked the country upon the fall of Saddam Hussein. Presidential envoy L. Paul Bremer III, who enjoyed the powers of an American

proconsul unseen since General Douglas MacArthur's days in occupied Japan, had erred mightily in disbanding the Iraqi security forces and pursuing his policy of "de-Ba'athification."

The pundits quickly personified their criticism. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld embodied everything that had gone wrong in Iraq. The supremely self-confident (many would say "arrogant") Pentagon chief had overruled his generals on countless occasions, pressing them to whittle down the number of troops tasked with the invasion of Iraq. He dismissed clear signs of a growing insurgency as he continued to push for a rapid reduction in U.S. forces during his visit to Baghdad in September 2003.[3] Along with Vice President Dick Cheney, Rumsfeld drew further criticism for isolating the President from virtually all but his views and creating an environment in both the Pentagon and the White House that equated disagreement with disloyalty.[4] The President too has come in for intense criticism for his dogged insistence that "we are winning" in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary and for insisting that victory required "staying the course" in Iraq, even if neither he nor anyone else could say what the course actually was. By 2006, American voters joined the chorus of dissatisfaction, handing the Republicans a stunning defeat that lost them control of both houses of Congress. The Democrats won, not by offering any viable alternative, but simply by opposing continuation of the same failed policy.

The election produced two immediate responses from the White House. First, the president sacked Rumsfeld. The unpopular Secretary of Defense could be clearly linked to the worst decisions on how to conduct the war, and his arrogant refusal to admit any mistakes or reconsider his approach endeared him to no one. Satisfying as his dismissal may have been on both sides of the political aisle, Rumsfeld's departure produced no change in the conduct of the war. Neither did the long-awaited Baker-Hamilton Report, the bipartisan study of the conflict deliberately withheld until after the election. Rather than accept its unpalatable recommendations, the President opted for a "Surge" strategy, sending in an additional 20,000 troops to clear and stabilize Baghdad and Anbar province of the insurgent threat. The plan smacked of the "one-more-big-push" approach employed to recoup a deteriorating situation during the Vietnam War and promised as little chance of lasting success.

All of these criticisms of the Iraq campaign, from poor intelligence to bad decision-making, have merit and must be addressed to answer the deceptively simple question, "What went wrong?" However, another deeper and more perplexing query must also be considered in assessing the campaign. Why does the U.S. military, despite its enormous resources, vast technological superiority, and proud history, have such difficulty with unconventional war? The answer to this deeper question lies not in

the current campaign but in the six decades preceding the invasion. Long before 9/11, Saddam Hussein, and the Bush administration, the United States developed a military establishment ideally suited to American society, culture, and politics. That establishment proved most effective in waging World War II by harnessing the nation's greatest strengths: vast resources, technological ingenuity, and public opinion that, once mobilized, possessed a firm and terrible resolve to see the conflict through to a conclusion, no matter what the cost.

The same historical forces that contrived to give the United States a superb conventional war-fighting machine inhibited its ability to fight protracted unconventional conflicts. The nature of American democracy and entrenched cultural values makes it difficult for the country to sustain a protracted conflict that does not threaten its very existence. A political system that sends the entire House of Representatives and one third of the Senate home to face the electorate every two years adds a mercurial quality to American politics that makes sustained support for controversial foreign policy ventures difficult. The Vietnam War demonstrated the limitations of a popular democracy fighting a protracted unconventional conflict. As the war dragged on and casualties mounted, the public became disillusioned, particularly after an end to college deferments made middle class young men eligible for the draft.

The American military did take at least some of the lessons of Vietnam to heart. They rebuilt the army as the world's best conventional war-fighting force and kept it focused on deterring, and if necessary stopping, a Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe. They resisted open-ended commitments and demanded clear goals, a definite end date, and a definitive exit strategy for every mission. They relegated COIN to the Special Forces community, which they distrusted to a considerable degree. This conventional emphasis helped win the Cold War and seemed to prove its continued worth in the Iraqi desert during the first Gulf War. During the decade of the 1990s, however, America's awesome conventional war machine seemed less and less suited to the realities of the post–Cold War world, which required small, mobile forces capable of intervening to end humanitarian crises and to rescue failed states. Unfortunately, the Pentagon and two administrations (one Republican and one Democrat) resisted adapting to the new realities so that America went to war in 2003 with armed forces largely unchanged since the late 1970s. Too many men and women, in and out of uniform, were comfortable with the status quo.

This book sets the Iraq war in historical context, moving beyond the blame game to ask the more difficult question of why the United States produced a particular type of military, superb at conventional war but ill-suited to wage a COIN campaign. The book's organization supports

its goal of contextualizing the conflict. Chapter 1 attempts to bring some order to the confusing array of terms and concepts used to describe modern conflict. The words "terrorism," "insurgency," "guerrilla warfare," "unconventional conflict," and "asymmetric warfare" have been tossed about so loosely as to create more confusion than clarity. They have also been erroneously treated as synonyms, often by politicians pursuing partisan goals. My analysis of unconventional war (the broad category under which the other terms fall), however, begins with a discussion of conventional war. Much misunderstanding of insurgency stems from failure to understand the basic nature of war itself. Most people, including many journalists, a disturbing number of politicians, and not a few academics, confuse strategy with tactics and cannot clearly distinguish between a division, a battalion, and a company. They also have little background on the theory and practice of warfare as it has evolved in the western world. The opening chapter provides an overview of these issues before examining unconventional conflict in general and insurgency in particular. It then defines COIN using historical examples to illustrate effective and ineffective approaches.

Chapter 2 explores "the American way of war," an approach to conflict that grew out of the country's history, culture, and political institutions. Although the U.S. military did have considerable experience with irregular warfare on its western frontier in the late nineteenth century and in the Philippines and Latin America during the era of gunboat diplomacy, World War II overwhelmed this experience and created a large conventional establishment committed to use of overwhelming force. The long and bitter experience of Vietnam led not, as might have been expected, to reconsideration of this approach, but to the rejection of COIN as a core task of the conventional armed forces and its relegation to Special Forces. This decision, reinforced by victory in the Cold War and the success of Operation Desert Storm (the first Gulf War; 1991), left the Army and Marine Corps ill-equipped for the challenges they face in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition to American military and political culture, the conflict has been shaped by the unique circumstances of Iraq itself. Chapter 3 considers these circumstances, tracing the tortuous history of the country from its creation at Versailles in 1919 to the eve of the U.S. invasion. It discusses at considerable length Iraq's complex demographics, including ethnic, religious, tribal, and clan associations. The chapter also examines U.S. policy toward the government of Saddam Hussein, which vacillated between support and hostility. This vacillation has encouraged at the very least wariness and at worst antipathy toward the United States on the part of ordinary Iraqis, which contributes to the instability of postwar Iraq. The first President Bush's call upon Shi'a and Kurds to rise up against Saddam in 1991 further eroded trust of the United States. The ensuing

revolts received no support and their suppression deepened the ethnic divides along which the country has split.

Chapter 4 analyzes the invasion of Iraq from the planning phase through initial occupation. It examines the ways in which failure to prepare for a protracted insurgency actually increased the probability that such a conflict would occur and made responding to it considerably more difficult. The United States deployed enough troops to defeat Saddam's armed forces but not nearly enough to pacify Iraq. Few soldiers or Marines had any training for COIN, and fewer had any experience with it. Those who did belonged to a Special Operations community marginalized by the conventional military establishment. Even the Special Forces used doctrine that presupposed they would be supporting a functioning government, not creating one.

Chapter 5 examines what most observers refer to as the "lost year." For three to six months following the invasion, the Pentagon and the White House denied the presence of a complex and growing insurgency despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Once they recognized the obvious, they failed to develop an effective COIN strategy. Eager to withdraw American troops, the Secretary of Defense insisted on replacing them with Iraqis as soon as possible, an approach made more difficult by the decision to disband Iraqi armed forces and de-Ba'athify the administration. Lacking strategic guidance and sufficient troops to secure an increasingly hostile country, commanders developed ad hoc responses to the mounting crisis. Some discovered the right approach while others defaulted to conventional war-fighting mode, employing firepower in ways that made a bad situation worse. Those officers who understood the conflict found their operations micromanaged by the "6,000-mile screwdriver" from Washington. These factors culminated in the disastrous first battle of Fallujah.

Showing their characteristic determination and adaptability, troops on the ground rediscovered and/or developed effective COIN methods. Chapter 6 chronicles these adaptations, which did not have a significant effect until the administration linked them together with a coherent, comprehensive strategy and increased the number of troops in Iraq. Change began on the ground and, only gradually, impacted military institutions. Whether these changes will bring the conflict to a satisfactory conclusion may depend more on domestic politics than it does on events in the Middle East. Like Vietnam, the Iraq war may be won or lost, not on the battlefield, but in American living rooms. The book concludes with an overview of possible scenarios for how the conflict may end, assesses short and long-term responsibility for the difficulties the troops have faced there, and suggests how the U.S. military might learn from the experience.

# CHAPTER 1

# THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

## UNDERSTANDING WAR

Most Americans see war as a state clearly distinguishable from peace. At some point political discourse, diplomacy, and/or economic sanctions fail to achieve a desired result, and the president sends in the military (with or without Congressional approval). Once war begins, popular wisdom has it, the politicians should step aside and let the soldiers do their job. Those disagreeing with the war, questioning its conduct, or proposing a resolution other than military victory find themselves accused of failing to support the troops and even of being unpatriotic. Many soldiers and even more civilians view political oversight during wartime as interference or micromanagement. When it occurs, defeat leads to accusations that if only the soldiers had been turned loose, they would have won.

Even the most straightforward conventional war does not conform to such simplistic notions, and unconventional conflict positively defies them. Any discussion of the Iraq war must be preceded by an overview of the nature of war in general, the organization and composition of armed forces, and their oversight in a democratic state. Such an overview can clarify the important distinction between conventional and unconventional war and allow for in-depth discussion of insurgency and counterinsurgency (COIN). This clarification provides a context necessary for considering the uniquely American approach to war and its impact on the Iraq conflict.

## WAR IN THE WESTERN WORLD

While organized warfare is as old as civilization, modern war dates to the seventeenth century when royal armies equipped with gunpowder

weapons replaced the free companies of mercenaries that ravaged central Europe during the Thirty Years War (1618–48).[1] The emerging nation states now held a near monopoly on coercive force, and war became a rational instrument of policy waged in support of limited political objectives. Monarchs fielded small professional armies comprised of men from the bottom tiers of society, pressed into service and led by aristocratic officers who controlled them through brutal discipline. The crown housed the troops in barracks, and fed, clothed, and supplied them, thus reducing the destructive need for soldiers to live off the land during campaigns and resort to brigandage when not employed.

Royal armies were small, numbering a few hundred thousand men, and kings used them sparingly to achieve specific objectives. A large eighteenth century battle might pit two field forces of 50,000 against each other. Systems of fortresses ranged along national frontiers combined with the small, professional nature of armies and the cost of raising them kept wars within narrow bounds. Because no one wished to see a return to the mayhem of the Thirty Years War, rules guided the conduct of war and the behavior of soldiers. For over a century, European warfare remained limited, particularly in its impact on civilian populations.

The French Revolution (1789) changed this situation dramatically. *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* gave ordinary people a stake in countries that they now willingly defended. While divine-right monarchs and even enlightened despots dared not arm the masses, the revolutionaries could institute the first real draft. The *lève en masse* conscripted large numbers of French men into the armies first of the republic and then the empire. As armies became larger, wars became deadlier, not merely as a result of greater manpower but because revolutionary ideology intensified passions and raised the stakes of conflict. Nationalism, which was to cause so much misery during the next two centuries, first reared its ugly head in the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon. Where eighteenth-century monarchs contented themselves with limited territorial gains, Napoleon fought battles of annihilation, quipping that one cannot make omelets without breaking eggs.

Despite these changes, two factors conspired to keep even Napoleonic warfare limited. Weapons had changed very little since the introduction of the flintlock a century before. Armies equipped with single shot, muzzle-loading, smooth-bore muskets with an effective range of 100 yards could do only so much damage to one another. In addition, command and control (the ability to handle units in battle) and logistics (the ability to supply them) limited the size of armies and, therefore, their destructive power. Napoleon found that as his armies grew larger, his ability to handle them in the field decreased. Writing in exile on the island of Elba, the emperor observed that he would be the last commander

to personally direct such forces in combat. As so often happens, students of war studied Napoleon's campaigns without considering what Napoleon himself later said about them.[2]

In the nineteenth century, command and control and logistics improved considerably and killing technology developed rapidly. The Prussians created the General Staff to handle larger armies. Under the Prussian system, promising officer cadets attended the *Kriegsakademie* (War College) in Berlin. There they studied theoretical and practical aspects of war fighting. Upon graduation they rotated between the General Staff in Berlin and regular army units. Assigned to battlefield formations, this cadre of trained staff officers, distinguishable by the bright red stripe they wore on each trouser leg, understood the campaign plan, knew how each unit fit into it, and could react to changing circumstances with the knowledge that their counterparts in other units would adjust accordingly. As the "brain" of the army, the Prussian General Staff allowed commanders to handle ever larger formations with a precision that would be augmented by telegraph, telephone, and radio.

The Prussians also produced the first modern treatise on war and its relationship to national power and international politics. In 1832, the soldier-theoretician Karl von Clausewitz wrote *Am Krieg* (*On War*), which has been required reading in military academies and staff colleges ever since. "War," Clausewitz declared, "is an act of violence to compel the enemy to do our will."[3] He also viewed war not as an independent activity but as an instrument of policy designed to achieve an objective that cannot be attained by other means. Achieving that political objective, he argued, not success on the battlefield, is the only true measure of victory in war.[4]

If the challenges of command and control could be met by organization and education, those of logistics could not. The ability to supply an army would limit its size until technology improved upon the horse and wagon. The industrial revolution provided the improvement by applying steam locomotion to land transport. Though never intended as an instrument of war, railroads would make it possible to transport and supply truly mass armies over great distances, so long as governments had the foresight to situate rail lines strategically to rapidly concentrate troops along the frontier with a potential adversary. Not surprisingly, Prussia excelled in this area as well. The locomotive's waterborne counterpart, the steam-propelled battleship, also allowed Europeans to project military power more effectively across the globe.

Beyond enabling commanders to move, supply, and control larger armies, the industrial revolution made warfare much deadlier by arming soldiers with more lethal weapons. Rifled muskets replaced smooth bores as the standard infantry weapon. Grooves within the barrels of these guns

gripped the bullet and spun it down the length of the barrel, increasing the range, accuracy, and penetrating power of the projectile.[5] Throughout the nineteenth century, armaments manufacturers refined the rifle, first replacing muzzle- with breach-loading designs, then adding magazines allowing soldiers to fire multiple rounds without reloading, and finally developing the machine gun. They made similar adaptations to the cannon, which also acquired a recoil mechanism to allow rapid fire without re-sighting the artillery piece. In addition to the rifle in its various incarnations, the industrial revolution produced shrapnel and armor-piercing shells, high explosives, smokeless powder (allowing soldiers to see the enemy more clearly), and barbed wire (originally intended to contain cattle, not stop attacking troops).

The patriotic fervor with its accompanying xenophobia unleashed by the French Revolution also deepened during the nineteenth century through the vehicle of free, compulsory public education. One Western European nation after another mandated primary schooling that taught students basic literacy, civics, and national pride. Public education thus complemented universal manhood conscription, which most European armies adopted by the middle of the nineteenth century. The patriotism that motivates men to die for their country easily leads to dehumanization of the enemy, which justifies killing soldiers or civilians.

Ironically, the initial application of industrial technology to armed conflict made wars shorter and less deadly. Because of its overwhelming superiority in the organization and conduct of warfare and the strategic attention it paid to railroads, Prussia dominated the battlefields of mid-nineteenth century Europe. The wars of unification, by which Prussia incorporated the northern German states into a single nation using Bismarck's formula of "blood and iron," were short, sharp affairs that dealt decisive defeats in rapid succession to Denmark, Austria, and France in a matter of months or even weeks. These brief wars misled a generation of officers who failed to consider the destructive capacity of mass armies comparably equipped with modern weapons. The race for colonies during the last quarter of the nineteenth century delayed such a confrontation for a generation.

Only the American Civil War provided an indication of the killing power of mass armies moved and supplied by rail and armed with rifled muskets. For four bloody years the Union and the Confederacy slugged it out in a war of attrition won by the North, not by superior military skill, but through the far greater resources a more populous industrial power could wield against a largely agrarian one. Even then maintaining support for an unpopular war proved President Abraham Lincoln's greatest challenge. The South came very close to achieving what North Vietnam accomplished and Iraq may yet do: persuading a war-weary people that

nothing made continuing the war worthwhile. The conflict also witnessed a blurring of the distinction between combatant and noncombatant to a degree not seen since the Thirty Years War. In July 1864, Confederate troops burned Chambersburg, Pennsylvania in an effort to expose the Northerners to the horrors of a war that had been fought almost entirely on Southern soil.[6] A month later Union General Philip Sheridan began his scorched-earth campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, depriving Confederate forces of food and fodder. These attacks upon civilians pale, however, when compared to General William T. Sherman's "March to the Sea." From November 15 to December 22, 1864, Sherman cut a 60-mile-wide swathe of destruction from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia. "I can make Georgia howl," he boasted of his effort to force Southern civilians to make their government sue for peace. Civil War generals, however, fell short of directly murdering civilians as a deliberate strategy.

Although most Western European nations assigned officers to both American armies, these military observers missed the Civil War's most poignant lesson. Because they shared Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder's contempt for the opposing forces, whom he described as "two armed mobs chasing one another through the woods," few found any useful tactical lessons worth adopting at home. In particular, they "repeatedly underestimated the extent to which firepower dominated the battlefields of 1861–1865."[7] The Prussians did, however, base their Field Railway Section on the Union Railroad Department, which had served Lincoln's Army so well.[8] This innovation facilitated their rapid victory during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71).

However ominous nineteenth century military developments may have been, they did not bear fruit until the twentieth century. Based in no small measure on their assessment of the Franco-Prussian War, military planners prepared for what they saw as the inevitable contest between rival alliance systems. All the belligerents, but especially Germany, counted on a decisive opening campaign in which a massive offensive would destroy enemy forces. Faced with the prospect of a two front war against France and its ally Russia, Germany counted on rapid mobilization to knock the French out of the war and then redeploying its forces in the east before Russia could mobilize. France planned on a major offensive into Alsace-Lorraine (taken by Germany in 1871), Russia prepared for offensives against German East Prussia and Austria-Hungary, while Austria-Hungary counted on attacking both Serbia and Russia. Within two months of the outbreak of war on August 1, 1914, the offensives had all ground to a halt. No one had a plan for what to do next.

The generals had run up against the technological impasse the North and South had discovered during the American Civil War, exacerbated by dramatically increased firepower and the constricted terrain of Western

Europe. Technology had given a decisive advantage to defensive warfare, an advantage that could not be overcome until the invention of the tank. Infantry protected by successive lines of trenches and bunkers defended by barbed wire and machine guns backed by heavy artillery could not be easily dislodged. Even if an offensive achieved a breakthrough, ground torn up by high explosive shells made it impossible to sustain the attack, which quickly outran its supplies. Unwilling to negotiate an end to the conflict, the belligerents waged a bloody war of attrition. In the end, the alliance with greater resources and manpower—France, Britain, Russia (until 1917), Italy, and belatedly the United States—won.

The conflict further eroded the barrier between combatant and noncombatant. A four-year war of attrition required governments to mobilize all the resources of the modern nation state and to assert authoritarian control over vast areas of civilian life in order to do so. Peacetime industries had to be converted to war production. Food shortages caused by blockades, submarine warfare, and the loss of farm laborers to the army necessitated rationing. Civilians in the path of invading armies suffered from direct military action. Others fell as collateral damage when ships were sunk or factories bombed. Even more succumbed to privations caused by war. To justify the enormous sacrifices, governments launched propaganda campaigns that proclaimed their cause and demonized the enemy. The bureaucracies necessary to manage conflict on such a scale grew enormously.

The First World War also introduced new weapons and gave birth to a new branch of the armed services. The tank and the flame thrower made their appearance on the battlefields of France as did poison gas. Airplanes, which had little impact on the conduct of operations and virtually no effect on the outcome of the war, nonetheless pointed the way to the future. Initially assigned to the army, air forces would eventually become independent services. Tanks provided the real solution to the stalemate of trench warfare. Their armor protected the crew and their tracks propelled the vehicles over torn up ground. The cumbersome prototypes did not, however, perform all that well, nor did they win the war. Like the airplane, they offered more in potential than in reality.

Twenty years after the "war to end war" Germany and Japan plunged the world into the most destructive conflict in history, a continuation of the 1914–18 struggle for hegemony in Europe and the Pacific. Italy switched sides, but otherwise the alliance configuration remained what it had been in 1914–18. Armored formations and motorized infantry transformed this struggle into a war of movement. Long-range bombers made every city a potential target, and ethnocentric propaganda obliterated any remaining distinction between combatant and noncombatant. The belligerents mobilized their entire societies for war and in so doing

made them "legitimate" targets. Civilians had died in all previous conflicts but seldom as deliberate targets of military action. The aerial bombardment of Warsaw and Rotterdam early in World War II set in motion an escalation that culminated in the fire bombing of Hamburg, the destruction of Dresden, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Eastern Europe, the Nazis waged a race war, weaving genocide into their military campaign strategy.[9]

Like the Thirty Years War, World War II ushered in an era not of further escalation, but one of greater restraint. Nuclear weapons made the consequences of total war unacceptable to all responsible parties. Once the Soviets got the bomb, "mutually assured destruction (MAD)" guaranteed that no one could win a nuclear exchange, which would devastate the planet. "World War III will be fought with nuclear weapons," physicist Albert Einstein quipped, "and World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." The nuclear stalemate produced a long series of limited conflicts and proxy wars in which the superpowers armed and maneuvered their client states, sometimes participated directly, but always avoided a general conflagration. To this new era of limited war belonged America's most vexing unconventional conflicts

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS

This brief overview of land warfare reveals patterns and trends necessary to understanding the current struggle in Iraq. To begin with, armed forces reflect the societies that create them. Those looking critically on their nation's military must realize that they are looking into a mirror. Historical circumstances may distort the image they see, but it should still be a familiar one. Modern conscript armies most closely resemble their societies. Depending on circumstances, volunteer armies may be slightly less representative of the general population, drawing recruits who enlist for economic benefit as well as those who join for patriotic reasons.

Beyond their composition, armed forces also act according to prevailing cultural and social norms shaped by their nations' histories. Prevailing attitudes toward the role of force in international relations, acceptable norms governing levels of violence, and the efficacy and value placed on international law shape military action. Political forces also shape the conduct of wars. Authoritarian regimes can sustain unpopular wars far longer than can democracies. Once mobilized to defend their country, however, citizens of a democracy often become a formidable fighting force. Despite consistencies in military organization and behavior across time and space, military establishments make war in different ways.

If the relationship between armed forces and the societies that create them represents a consistent pattern in the history of conflict, other

characteristics change over time. Distinct trends have shaped the evolution of warfare since the eighteenth century. From 1789 to 1945, several factors conspired to make armed conflict deadlier. The ideology of the French Revolution laid the groundwork for the democracies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These democracies, however limited their franchises, fielded armies of citizen soldiers who fought and died for their countries. Patriotism taught in free public schools inspired national pride but also xenophobia. Blended with social Darwinism, nationalism justified first colonialism, then jingoistic war, and ultimately genocide. Ideology, which inflames passion, usually makes war deadlier, a fact made abundantly clear by the al-Qaeda campaign of terror.

As nationalism inspired men to fight, industrialization gave them the tools to kill more effectively. Rifles, breechloaders, machine guns, and heavy artillery hurling high explosive shells added to the carnage of war. Railroads enabled states to field and supply truly mass armies. Airplanes allowed them to attack the enemy's homeland. As war changed from a contest between armies to a titanic struggle between peoples, the distinction between soldier and civilian all but disappeared. This trend reached its logical, horrific culmination in mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After that, the consequences of further escalation in the conduct of war became unacceptable.

A final rather obvious truth about the nature of Western warfare has been so often missed in discussion of Iraq and Afghanistan that it needs to be reiterated. Conventional armed forces have always been designed to fight other conventional forces. Their organization, training, and equipment does not prepare them to combat insurgents, criminals, or terrorists. Only by thinking and acting counterintuitively to their conventional mind-set can soldiers adapt to the demands of irregular warfare. To that conventional organization and thinking we must now turn in an effort to understand the challenge of COIN in Iraq.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF ARMIES

Land forces, which have historically born the brunt of conventional war fighting, are divided into broad functional groups. Combat units, often referred to as the "teeth" of an army, consist of infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. Until the twentieth century, "cavalry" meant soldiers fighting on horseback with lance, saber, or carbine. After the First World War, horse troopers traded their mounts for tanks, armored cars, and (much later) helicopters. Support units (logistics, combat engineers, signals, intelligence, etc.) provide the combat arms with the wherewithal to fight, making up the "tail" of the army. Military personnel in the tail have outnumbered those comprising the teeth by anywhere from 4–7 to 1.

Recognizing the importance of logistics, the Germans rightly dubbed modern warfare a "*materialschlacht*," a battle of supply.

Combat formations consist of subgroups ranging from the smallest effective fighting unit to the largest formation that can be effectively handled on a battlefield. While unit names have remained relatively constant, their size and composition have varied widely over time as communications and other changes have facilitated command and control of larger formations. Using round approximate figures for traditional formations, a section of infantry consists of 10 men, a platoon 30 (three sections), a company 100, a battalion 800 (eight companies), a regiment 1,000, a brigade 2,500, a division 10,000, a corps 50,000. Formations at battalion level include staff and support elements. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) command sections, lieutenants platoons, captains or majors companies, lieutenant-colonels battalions, colonels regiments, brigadiers (one-star generals) brigades, major (two-star) generals divisions, and lieutenant (three-star) generals corps. In large conventional wars, corps are combined into armies and armies into army groups. In the American command system, four-star generals serve as regional commanders and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Since the eighteenth century, success on the battlefield has come from the skillful combination of units in a "combined arms" approach to warfare. In the age of single-shot, smooth bore muskets, artillery would disrupt enemy formations, and then infantry would advance to within 100 yards and discharge volleys of musket balls. Once the enemy formation began to waver and/or break, cavalry would advance to pursue and destroy individual soldiers. As armies grew larger, handling them became more complicated. The need to advance along different routes to concentrate for an engagement made the subunits of an army vulnerable to defeat in detail (piecemeal). The division solved this problem by creating a formation with its own infantry, cavalry, artillery, and support units. A division could advance more rapidly than an entire army and defend itself if attacked by a larger force, holding out until other divisions came to its aid by "marching to the sound of the guns."

The invention of the tank and the airplane further complicated the theory and practice of combined arms operations. Following their defeat in the First World War, the Germans mastered the new combination first, albeit by reading treatises written by British officers ignored in their own country.[10] While most armies treated tanks as nothing but mobile artillery batteries, tying them to infantry units, the Germans created the first mechanized divisions. Heavy tanks would punch through the enemy line, followed by light tanks to widen the breech. Motorized infantry transported by truck and/or half-track followed to secure the flanks of the corridor opened by the rapidly advancing armored column. Regular,

foot-slogging infantry would follow to mop up pockets of resistance and expand the corridor. Dive bombers provided close air support for the advancing armored forces in a deadly combination dubbed *"blitzkrieg"* (lightning war).[11] The armored columns that drove to Baghdad in 2003 descended from the *Panzer* (armored) divisions that sliced through France in 1940.

## THE CONDUCT OF WAR

The use of armed forces to achieve political objectives and their employment in action requires prewar planning and constant training. Broad categories define theses tasks. The use and misuse of these military terms in the media and popular discourse require their clear definition.

*Grand Strategy* is the combination of all elements of national power to achieve a desired objective. These elements might include diplomatic initiatives, economic sanctions, and the threat or use of military force. Unfortunately, grand strategy exists more often in theory than in practice. Nations resort far too quickly to war without fully exploiting other approaches. Once they go to war, governments tend to neglect other avenues for resolving crises. Critics of the Iraq conflict have specifically drawn attention to the lack of anything approaching a "grand strategy" for defeating the insurgency and building a stable country.

*Strategy* is the set of principles that guide military planning and operations. For example, a containment strategy would have as its goal preventing an enemy from using military power to achieve its objective. A balance of power strategy would aim to prevent any single state establishing military dominance. A preemptive strategy would seek out and destroy military threats before they could be used. Strategy also identifies *centers of gravity*, targets or pressure points that force can leverage to produce the desired result. In conventional war, the opposing army might be the center of gravity. Defeat it and you win. Alternatively, the enemy capital might be the center of gravity. Capture that city and the enemy surrenders. In insurgency, the center of gravity is often popular support. Who has it, the government, or the insurgents? Military strategy should be but one part of a broader national or grand strategy.

*Operations* are the actions taken to achieve strategic goals in the area of conflict. An *Operational or Campaign Plan* delineates an *order of battle* (forces available for deployment) and outlines how they will be combined within a theater of operations to defeat the enemy. Sometimes described as "fighting on a map," *operations* require the skillful coordination of different units and communication of *the commander's intent* (military goal) to subordinates who must execute the plan. The invasion of Iraq, for example, involved air, land, and sea *operations*. In 2004, the Marines

launched a specific *operation* to recapture Fallujah. Following a surge of troops in late 2006, U.S. armed forces launched a major operation to stabilize Baghdad. Individual operations achieve specific objectives that ultimately accomplish the strategic goal.

*Tactics* are the methods employed by individuals and units in conducting operations, "fighting on the ground" as opposed to "fighting on the map." Enveloping an enemy force in a conventional battle or clearing a street in Najaf require specific tactics as does armored warfare and aerial combat. The Pentagon formulates strategy, field commanders plan and conduct operations to implement the strategy, and ordinary soldiers employ the tactics that win engagements.

## UNCONVENTIONAL WAR

If conventional conflict lends itself to clear definition, unconventional war does not. The term generally refers to conflict between conventional armed forces and adversaries operating out of uniform in loose formations in support of an *insurgency*, a clandestine political movement to gain control of a country from within. Insurgents employ *guerrilla warfare* and *terror* to achieve objectives. Terror employed in the service of a broad ideological movement as opposed to a focused political movement has come to be called *terrorism*. Because unconventional conflict pits weak against strong adversaries, it is sometimes called *asymmetric warfare*. Given the ambiguity surrounding them and their misuse in popular parlance and political discourse, insurgency, terror, and terrorism need to be examined in some detail.

### Insurgency

The U.S. Department of Defense defines insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict."[12] This definition can be applied to virtually any form of political violence. It does not identify guerrilla warfare as the principle type of "armed conflict" employed and fails to recognize terror as a weapon used by insurgents. Insurgency usually arises from bad governance. When a significant segment of the population feels alienated from a government that neither represents it nor meets its needs, an insurgent organization offers an alternative to that government. Insurgents use propaganda to persuade these disaffected people that once they overthrow the existing regime, the new one will take better care of them. Once *subversion* erodes popular support for (or at least tolerance of) those in power, insurgents can begin their campaign of *guerrilla warfare*.

Guerrilla warfare has a long history, but the term itself dates to the Napoleonic Wars. During the Peninsular campaign against French occupation, the Duke of Wellington made use of Spanish irregulars. Operating out of uniform, these men conducted hit-and-run attacks, ambushing supply columns and overwhelming small outposts before melting back into the general population. They took their name from the Spanish word for "small war," "*guerrilla.*" During the Franco-Prussian War, the French employed units of *francs-tireurs* (snipers), irregulars operating out of uniform to attack Prussian soldiers as they passed or to threaten their supply lines. The Soviets employed similar forces against the German invaders during World War II, as did the Yugoslavs. Guerrillas such as these, operating in support of regular forces, are often called "partisans."

Insurgent guerrillas employ the same tactics as partisans but to a different purpose. As the military wing of an insurgency they operate out of uniform using hit-and-run tactics against police, administrators, and small military units to weaken and further discredit the government. After an operation they melt back into civil society, where most hold jobs and live normal lives. Like partisans, insurgent guerrillas will attack small military and police units but avoid larger, better equipped formations. Insurgent guerrillas have two objectives. They want to sap the strength of government forces (in the same way that fleas weaken a dog by causing anemia) until they grow strong enough to defeat those forces in conventional battle.[13] They also seek to provoke the government into retaliating against the general population accused of harboring insurgents. This overreaction further increases popular support for the insurgents.

Insurgents thus create a parallel, clandestine state with its own government, armed forces, and other institutions. That shadow regime then challenges the existing one for the loyalty of the people, or at least a significant percentage of them.[14] The conflict becomes less a contest of arms than a bidding war for the hearts and minds of the people.

### Terror, Terrorism, and Insurgency

A clear distinction must be made between terror, terrorism, and insurgency. *Terror* is first and foremost a weapon or a tactic that can be employed by a variety of actors. Unlike conventional weapons, terror achieves its effect through the fear it inspires in those who observe acts of violence. For this reason, terror has been described as a macabre form of theater performed for an unwitting audience whose behavior the perpetrator wishes to influence.[15] Governments have long used terror to discourage rebellion, as the Roman practice of crucifixion illustrates. Extremist organizations like al-Qaeda have relied so heavily on terror

and used it with so little restraint in support of a utopian ideology that analysts describe their activity as *terrorism.*

While threatened governments frequently label insurgency as terrorism, the two should not be confused. Terrorist organizations usually do not confine themselves to gaining power within a single state, and insurgents use terror sparingly to avoid alienating the very people whose support they desire.[16] They employ "agitational" terror, attacking public buildings, assassinating politicians and civil servants, and destroying symbols of the current regime. They use "enforcement" terror to keep their own supporters in line and to discourage ordinary people from cooperating with the government.[17] Failure to protect people from insurgent terror further erodes support for a threatened government.

### Types of Insurgency

Although insurgencies conform to broad principles, they have taken specific forms and in some cases followed prescribed theories of revolution. Mao Zedong's primer on guerrilla warfare saw revolution progressing through distinct phases from subversion through mobile war. His Chinese communists based their insurgency firmly on the country's vast rural population, leading Mao to describe insurgents as fish swimming in a sea of peasant support that would eventually drown the cities.[18] Mao's theory inspired communist-led, anticolonial "wars of national liberation" such as Ho Chi Minh's defeat of the French in Indochina. In Cuba, Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Fidel Castro developed the *foco* theory, an adaptation of Marxist insurgency suitable to Latin America. Insurgent cells or *focos* planted among disenfranchised people would be the seed of revolution. The strategy worked brilliantly in Cuba but failed miserably in Bolivia, where the Bolivian Army captured and summarily executed Guevara in 1967.

In the postcolonial era, few insurgencies gained enough strength to overthrow an established government. Realization of their own relative weakness led many insurgents to pursue a different strategy. They provoked government forces into committing atrocities on such a scale that a foreign state or an alliance of powers intervened on their behalf. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) baited Serbian military and paramilitary forces into brutal ethnic cleansing of Albanians in the province of Kosovo. They understood that the Western alliance, appalled by similar atrocities in Croatia and Bosnia during the previous decade, would no longer tolerate such behavior. Led by the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched a 78-day bombing campaign that forced Serbian withdrawal from Kosovo. With the province declaring its independence, the KLA has succeeded even though it could never have

hoped to defeat the Serbian army. Zionist insurgents had employed the same strategy to evict the British from Palestine in 1947.

Insurgencies that fail to take over a country can still improve the conditions of their people. Although the Basque insurgent organization Fatherland and Liberty (ETA in the Basque language) has not achieved its stated goal of an independent Basque homeland, it has extracted valuable concessions from the Spanish government, including a greater degree of local autonomy, official use of the Basque language in the province, and consideration of Basque culture and institutions. The *Fabrundo Martí* National Liberation Front failed to topple the Salvadoran government, but it opened up the democratic process in El Salvador, encouraged the government to respect human rights, and ultimately became a legitimate political party. While the Provisional Irish Republican Army (usually referred to as the Irish Republican Army [IRA] ) failed to unify Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, it did succeed in improving the living conditions for Catholics and secured for them a share in political power.

*Counterinsurgency*, as the prefix "counter" indicates, is a campaign to defeat insurgency. However, as COIN expert Sir Robert Thompson concluded, a state that merely reacts to insurgency faces defeat.[19] Successful COIN requires a comprehensive, proactive strategy. Most insurgencies arise from bad governance—the failure of those in power to meet the basic needs of their own people—and so a threatened regime must begin by considering how its own actions helped provoke the crisis. Grossly inequitable distribution of wealth, widespread poverty, lack of opportunity, and nonexistent or inadequate public services may cause people to support an insurgency. Once it has addressed these economic and social issues, a threatened state should engage in political reform to include groups left out of the political process. Giving citizens a voice and a vote discourages them from accepting the alternative governance offered by the insurgents.

Because attacking the economic, social, and political causes of unrest is a bidding war for the support or at least the acceptance of disaffected people, this aspect of COIN has been dubbed "winning hearts and minds." Unfortunately, this concept has been trivialized and sentimentalized as an idealistic effort to get people to love their government. Nothing could be further from the truth. A hearts-and-minds campaign seeks to identify and address the grievances that cause unrest.

While addressing the root causes of insurgency through development and reform, the government must attack the insurgent organization. However, the manner in which the security forces (military and police) conduct operations can make or break the COIN campaign. Insurgents operate within a sympathetic (or at least tolerant) population. Troops frustrated at taking casualties from an enemy they cannot even see may

be tempted to retaliate against entire communities accused of supporting the guerrillas. Aware of this temptation, insurgents often provoke the security forces into such excesses. Indiscriminate use of force invariably makes a bad situation worse by punishing those with no real power to resist the insurgents. Every reprisal, errant bomb, or misdirected shot recruits more supporters for the insurgency.

Using force with discrimination requires *intelligence*, accurate information on the insurgents' identity, whereabouts, and intentions. As British General and COIN expert Sir Frank Kitson observed, defeating insurgents consists "vary largely in finding them."[20] Unfortunately, the process of gathering intelligence, analyzing it, and using it to direct operations against the insurgents is misunderstood by most politicians, the general public, and far too many soldiers. Like so many aspects of modern warfare, intelligence has become the domain of specialists. Those not in the business of intelligence gathering treat it as an Easter egg hunt. Somewhere in the conflicted country lies the golden egg that the intelligence specialists must find so that the combat arms can hunt down the bad guys. This narrow approach to intelligence results in an overemphasis on penetrating the insurgent organization and on interrogating prisoners to get information, which can, in turn, lead to abuses like those perpetrated at Abu Ghraib.[21]

In COIN, intelligence must be generated by operations, which in turn lead to further operations, which produce more intelligence, and so on. Ordinary soldiers, not intelligence specialists, gather the information, acting on it immediately if necessary but also passing it up the chain of command for further analysis. Kitson described this process as "turning background information into contact information" and thereby creating a chain reaction that helps defeat the insurgency.[22] While interrogation of captured insurgents can produce results, the best information usually comes not from coerced confessions or even spies who have infiltrated the insurgent organization, but from its disenchanted supporters. By persuading people to support the government rather than the insurgents, the hearts-and-minds campaign produces intelligence, which enables soldiers and police to focus their use of force on the diehards. Winning hearts and minds, gathering intelligence, and using force judiciously should thus interact in a continuous cycle of success.

If COIN is difficult for a threatened state, it is even harder for a foreign government supporting that state. The nation providing assistance may train, equip, and otherwise assist a government over whose behavior it has little control. U.S. support for the threatened government of El Salvador illustrates this point. Although American advisors viewed with alarm the human rights record of the Salvadoran military, they could do little to improve the situation because the Salvadoran government knew

that the Reagan administration placed a higher priority on combating communism than it did on promoting human rights or social justice in Latin America.[23]

## THE BALANCE SHEET

The great disparity between insurgent victories and defeats reveals the difficulty conventional armed forces face in combating unconventional threats. However, since the majority of successful insurgencies triumphed over "soft" colonial targets following World War II, this disparity may be misleading.[24] Insurgencies against more firmly established states or those enjoying the backing of a major power fared less well. Still, the insurgent record remains impressive.

Despite the allied victory, World War II shattered the myth of European invincibility, especially in Asia, where the Japanese had humiliated Britain, France, and the Netherlands with a series of rapid victories. Local insurgencies, many of which grew out of anti-Japanese resistance movements, sprang up to resist reassertion of colonial control. In Indonesia, a coalition of nationalist and communist groups declared independence from the Netherlands in August 1945. Dutch forces, initially assisted by the British, who secured the archipelago from the Japanese, launched a series of "police actions" against the insurgents. Although they secured major cities and killed as many as 100,000, they could control no more than small enclaves among the more than 3,000 islands of the archipelago. They lost 6,000 of their own troops and incurred economic costs that they could ill afford given the need to rebuild the war-torn Netherlands. Widespread anticolonialism and fear that continued conflict would give communists control of the emerging nation encouraged Dutch withdrawal. Growing American criticism of Dutch COIN methods and a threat to cut off Marshall Plan aid tipped the scales decisively in favor of the nationalists. The Dutch recognized Indonesian independence in December 1949.[25]

The French fared no better in reasserting control over their former colony of Indochina (the modern states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), though the war there lasted much longer and proved far more costly. The insurgency began in the north following Japanese withdrawal. Using the same heavy-handed methods employed by the Dutch, the French regained control of the major cities and towns, which Viet Minh forces led by Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap, following classic Maoist doctrine, isolated. The communist takeover of China in 1949 gave the Viet Minh a safe haven and source of supply in that neighboring country. To recoup the deteriorating situation, the French established a massive fortified base at Dien Ben Phu astride a key insurgent supply

route in 1954. They hoped to lure the Viet Minh into attacking the stronghold, where French artillery would destroy them. Instead, the communist guerrillas disassembled and hauled their own guns onto the surrounding hills, thought by French generals to be insurmountable. Giap pounded the base into submission, killing 7,000 French troops and capturing 11,000 more.[26] The French withdrew from what became North Vietnam and granted independence to Laos and Cambodia. They set up a pro-western government in South Vietnam under the support of the United States, which would remain in the country until 1973.

No sooner did France leave Indochina than it faced another insurgency closer to home. For over a century, the French had occupied Algeria, first as a colony, and then as a department of metropolitan France, albeit one ruled by a minority of white residents. In the 1950s, nationalist fervor struck Africa as it had Asia. From 1954 to 1962, French forces fought a protracted war against insurgents operating in the countryside and in the capital. A concerted effort by Colonial Paratroopers broke up the insurgent organization in Algiers but did so using extralegal methods, including torture, which drew international criticism and eroded support for the war within France.

Of the European colonial powers, Britain alone enjoyed any success in combating insurgency. It defeated communist guerrillas in Malaya (1948–60), countered the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya (1952–60), and thwarted a Greek nationalist insurgency in Cyprus (1955–59). It also suffered defeat at the hands of Zionist insurgents in Palestine (1945–47) and nationalists in South Arabia (1964–67). Its success owed much to a century of imperial policing. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the British had engaged in a continuous series of border skirmishes, internal security operations, and full-scale COIN campaigns. They had conducted these operations in a variety of settings throughout an empire covering a quarter of the earth's land surface and encompassing 25 percent of its populations. Out of this diverse and extensive experience, the British fashioned a flexible approach based on three broad principles: minimum force, civil-military cooperation, and decentralization of command and control.[27] British success has continued beyond the colonial era. One of its most spectacular victories came in Oman (1970–75), where British contract and loan officers in cooperation with Special Air Service (SAS) teams assisted the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces in defeating a communist-led insurgency in Dhofar province. Following a rather slow start characterized by serious mistakes, the British Army has performed well during the 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland. Given its success, the British approach to COIN merits further consideration.

## BRITISH COUNTERINSURGENCY

British COIN developed out of a unique legal framework and more than a century's experience handling civil unrest. At the core of the British approach lay the common law principle of "aid to the civil power." English common law requires anyone to aid the civil authorities when called upon to do so and makes no distinction between soldier and civilian. During a state of war British forces do not operate in aid to the civil power and are subject to the Mutiny Act (the equivalent of the Uniform Code of Military Justice) and international agreements such as the Geneva Convention. Internal conflicts, however, occur under conditions in which civil authority still functions. This legal framework has had profound implications for the conduct of internal security operations ranging from riot to full-scale rebellion.

To begin with, "aid to the civil power" put the civilian authority firmly in control of handling unrest. A magistrate would typically request troops to quell a disturbance and provide general guidance for their employment. He would not exercise tactical control of the troops, but the military would be held accountable for its action under ordinary civil law. Quelling temporary disturbances such as riots proved to be relatively straightforward. Full-blown insurgencies presented a more complex challenge requiring the civil authorities to be in close partnership with the military and police. This partnership resulted in a comprehensive approach that addressed the causes of unrest while countering its violent manifestations.

"Aid to the Civil Power" also placed significant restrictions on the military. Like police and those called upon to assist them, they were bound by the common law principle of minimum force. According to this principle, soldiers could use just enough force to achieve the immediate effect of stopping unrest in a particular location. Following the infamous massacre at Amritsar, India in 1919, General Reginald Dyer faced disciplinary action, not because he opened fire on an illegal meeting, but because he continued firing after the crowd had begun to disperse. As long as the offenders were British subjects, soldiers had to exercise restraint. "There is, however, one principle that must be observed in all action taken by the troops," one field manual instructed, "No more force shall be applied than the situation demands."[28] A legal principle could not, of course, prevent excesses from occurring, but it did have the desirable affect of subordinating use of military force to a broader political strategy aimed at addressing the causes of unrest and winning the hearts and minds of disaffected people.

Winning hearts and minds has become a much maligned and often misunderstood concept that conjures up images of soldiers building playgrounds for smiling children, diverting personnel and resources

from their proper task of fighting wars. A hearts-and-minds campaign, however, consists of soberly assessing what motivates people to rebel and devising a strategy to address the underlying causes of unrest. In most cases discontent stems from bread-and-butter issues. Lack of jobs, decent housing, electricity, running water, health care, and education can motivate people to accept or even actively support insurgents. Once their basic needs have been met, however, people may desire political freedoms, the absence of which can also fuel an insurgency.

Realization that rebellion demands a political solution combined with the legal limits placed on the amount of force the military could use led the British to develop a comprehensive approach to COIN. Soldiers and police (collectively dubbed "security forces") provided a shield behind which political, social, and economic reform took place. Improving living conditions and a growing conviction that the government would win encouraged ordinary people to provide intelligence on insurgent activity. This intelligence in turn allowed the security forces to take the offensive. Successful operations combined with generous amnesties and even monetary rewards enticed insurgents to surrender, producing more intelligence leading to further success.

Combining the various elements of the British approach into a coherent and effective COIN campaign required a mechanism of coordination. During the Malayan Emergency, the British developed a committee system at district, state, and federal levels. At the local level, these committees consisted of the District Commissioner (a civil administrator), the Chief of Police, and the commander of troops in the area (usually a Lieutenant Colonel commanding a battalion). The High Commissioner and Director of Military Operations (a joint appointment), Sir Gerald Templer, insisted that committees meet at least once a day, if only for "a whiskey and soda."[29] The system worked well in Malaya and could be adapted to a variety of situations right up to and including Northern Ireland and Iraq.

The British facilitated cooperation with the police and civil authorities through extended military postings. Dubbed "framework deployment," this approach kept units in a specific local for extended periods rather than moving them around. Soldiers, like policeman on a beat, got to know an area intimately. They met the locals, learned who belonged in their neighborhood and who did not, and developed good relations with community leaders. This prolonged contact sometimes yielded valuable intelligence on the insurgents.

The British approach does not offer a clear blueprint for success. The British made serious mistakes even in successful campaigns and experienced significant failures. Some insurgencies cannot be defeated even with the best of methods as the British learned in Palestine

and South Arabia.[30] The victories in Malaya, Oman, and Northern Ireland occurred under highly favorable circumstances and, except for Oman, were at best qualified successes. Moreover, the "British" approach had been discovered and applied independently by other militaries. French Marshal Lyautey pacified Morocco in the interwar period using an "oil patch" strategy that involved clearing an area and holding it with small units who would secure it by living among the people. The U.S. military also conducted successful COIN campaigns in the early twentieth century. All of this experience attests to the ability of conventional forces to fight unconventional wars, however difficult these may be.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR

## ARMED FORCES AND SOCIETY

Like any national institutions, the armed forces of the United States reflect the larger society that created them. They have been shaped by history and culture. These powerful influences have turned the U.S. military into an unrivaled conventional fighting force while severely limiting its ability to conduct a large-scale protracted COIN campaign. Examining the evolution of American armed forces, in particular the Army and Marines, within the context of American culture provides an important framework for understanding operations in Iraq. That culture and experience produced a strategic concept based on bringing enemy forces to battles of annihilation in which American superiority in resources and manpower would prove decisive. Dubbed "the American way of war" this approach has been effective in conventional conflicts but problematic in unconventional ones.[1]

## THE SOLDIER IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Americans have always been leery of a strong central government and even more uneasy about the greatest implement of national power, a standing army. Europe's royal armies had, after all, supported monarchy, which the colonists had rejected. As a safeguard against tyranny, Americans created not a strong centralized nation but a loose confederation of states. These states preferred their own militias, which the Federal government could mobilize under the leadership of a small professional officer cadre in the event of a national emergency. The Constitution, which replaced the Articles of Confederation in 1787, recognized the need for a stronger national army but continued to worry about how it might be

used. To prevent despotism, the framers of the Constitution divided control of the military between the executive and legislative branches of government, making the President commander-in-chief of the armed forces while giving Congress control of the military budget. Although they could never have imagined it, the founding fathers created a major impediment to COIN campaigns abroad. An electorate unhappy with a protracted war could easily gain control of at least one branch of government to impede the conduct of such a conflict or end it entirely.

For the first century and a half of its life, most of the republic's wars would remain short and its armed forces small. The Civil War, of course, proved the exception to that rule as North and South fought over the survival of the nation. Federal forces expanded dramatically, but reverted to the size and status of a garrison army guarding the frontier once the occupation of the Confederacy ended in 1877. The Army expanded again in 1898 to fight the Spanish-American War and in 1917 to participate in the last year of the First World War. On each occasion, it contracted as it had done after the Civil War.

## AMERICA'S COIN ERA

Contrary to popular belief, the U.S. military has had extensive COIN experience. For much of the country's history, small wars were its stock in trade. From the late nineteenth century to the outbreak of World War II, the Army and Marine Corps conducted unconventional operations in the Philippines, the Caribbean, and Central America. These operations produced a wealth of practical experience, much of it preserved in the 1940 U.S. Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual*.[2] Unfortunately, the largest conventional war in human history erased most of the institutional memory of these conflicts.

### The Philippine Insurrection

America's first COIN campaign took place not in Vietnam but in the Philippines in the early 1900s. Following the Spanish-American War, the administration of William McKinley moved to annex the islands. Realization that the American "liberators" had become imperialists encouraged the nationalist leader Emilio Aguinaldo to launch an insurgency against the new foreign occupiers. Aguinaldo, who had first launched his revolution against Spain in 1897, had been returned to Manila by the Americans during the Spanish-American War. He had every reason to believe that the Philippines would receive independence.

The archipelago confronted the U.S. Army with a complex and challenging physical and human geography. It consists of 7,000 islands, with

very few roads or other infrastructure at the time of the rebellion. In 1900, the islands had a population of 7.4 million divided into diverse ethnic groups. Half of these people lived on Luzon, concentrated around the capital of Manila and on that island's central plane.[3] Fortunately for the United States, the insurgency remained within the Tagolog community on Luzon and neighboring Samra. Besides operating within a single ethnic group, the rebels also based their "republic" on a narrow franchise confined to the gentry class, missing an opportunity to mobilize the mass of Filipino peasants.[4] Independent uprisings among the Muslim Morros did occur on the island of Mindanao, but this activity belonged to a recurring cycle of violence that predated the American arrival. The Morros did not coordinate their uprising with Aguinaldo's.

Despite these disadvantages, Aguinaldo had a reasonable chance of succeeding. While he could never have defeated the military power of the United States, he might have made the cost of further occupation unacceptably high. People at home considered imperialism un-American. Mounting casualties and reports of U.S. atrocities further eroded support for an unpopular war. As the election of 1900 approached, Aguinaldo stepped up attacks in the mistaken belief that doing so would help the anti-imperialist candidate William Jennings Bryant.[5]

The conflict unfolded in a now familiar pattern that bears an almost uncanny resemblance to the Iraq War. The fighting began on the night of February 4, 1899, when an American sentry killed a Filipino, sparking a general attack by Aguinaldo's Army of Liberation. The U.S. forces soundly defeated the insurgents in this battle and in a series of conventional engagements throughout the spring. The rainy season forced a halt to military operations and allowed the United States to send in much-needed reinforcements. In the fall the Army cleared the Luzon plane of Aguinaldo's forces and nearly captured the rebel leader himself. He fled to the mountainous northeast of the island to regroup, leaving the Americans to believe that they had broken the back of the rebellion.

At this point in the conflict, Aguinaldo made a strategic decision to shift to guerrilla warfare. He disbanded the Army of Liberation and reorganized his forces into semi-autonomous bands of 30–50 men. These groups conducted classic hit-and-run operations, becoming proficient enough to engage American units up to company strength. Like virtually all insurgent leaders, Aguinaldo set up a shadow government to collect revolutionary taxes, draw supplies, and recruit fighters from the communities among whom his guerrillas operated. At the peak of their strength, the insurgents may have numbered as many as 80,000. They knew the terrain, spoke the local language, understood the culture, and so had better intelligence than their adversaries.[6]

Initially, the U.S. Army responded to the insurgency as conventional soldiers often do. Frustrated by their inability to identify, let alone defeat, the enemy, they punished entire communities for aiding the insurgents, even when their inhabitants had little choice. Soldiers destroyed property, murdered civilians, tortured suspects for information, and summarily executed prisoners. In some areas, they swept the local population into concentration camps to keep them from supplying the guerrillas, employing the very tactic employed by the Spanish in Cuba and condemned by the jingoistic press on the eve of the Spanish-American War. Thousands died of disease from overcrowding and poor sanitation. Although more common at the outset of the guerrilla campaign, such excesses never completely disappeared. Brutality did not, however, defeat the insurrection.[7] The United States never deployed more than 24,000 soldiers in the field at any given time, a force far too small to terrorize a population of 7 million into submission.[8]

The U.S. Army won by devising and formulating an effective COIN strategy and then developing the organization and tactics to implement it. In today's military terms, the United States employed a comprehensive approach that targeted the insurgents' strategic and operational center of gravity. Since the insurgents wanted independence, granting it (albeit on U.S. terms) seemed the best way to counter this demand. The McKinley administration and its successors saw annexation and development as preludes to eventual sovereignty. They feared with considerable justification that if America withdrew immediately, the islands might easily be snapped up by a European power. In the imperialist craze at the turn of the twentieth century, this might well have happened. Power sharing and some degree of local autonomy seemed the next best thing to full independence. William Howard Taft headed the Philippine Commission created to oversee civil administration. The military handed over control of each province as it was pacified and the Commission selected and paid Filipinos to run their own affairs. Taft also appointed Filipinos to the Commission itself.[9]

Meanwhile, the Army identified the insurgents' organization as their operational center of gravity. They quickly learned, however, that killing and capturing guerrillas would not in and of itself end the uprising. They focused much of their energy on breaking the link between the general population and the guerrilla groups. They divided the threatened areas into four military districts, subdivided into small unit areas. This approach enabled a unit commander to know his area and its people well and allowed him considerable latitude in carrying out his duties.[10] At the same time that it decentralized operations, the army achieved unity of command throughout the islands. General Arthur MacArthur (father of the famous World War II commander), who took over from General

Elwell Otis in May 1900, declared martial law in December, and invoked General Orders No. 100. Promulgated by President Abraham Lincoln to govern occupied Confederate territory during the Civil War, the Orders provided an excellent framework for COIN. While harsh by today's standards, most legal experts at the time considered them very humane.[11]

The Orders gave the governor general (MacArthur) civil and military power. They specified draconian measures to be taken against insurgents and those who supported them, including capital punishment handed down by courts martial. The Orders also set down strict guidance for proper treatment of the civilian population and captured insurgents. "Military oppression is not Martial Law," the edict warned,

> It is the abuse of the power which that law confers. As Martial Law is executed by military force, it is incumbent upon those who administer it to be strictly guided by the principles of justice, honor, and humanity—virtues adorning a soldier even more than other men, for the very reason that he possesses the power of his arms against the unarmed.

The Orders laid down rules for handling prisoners, distinguishing between public property of rebels (which could be seized) and private property (which could not), and demanded respect for religious institutions and the dignity of persons.[12]

Military commanders also engaged in what would today be called Civil Affairs projects. They built schools, constructed roads, improved sanitation, and inoculated Filipinos against smallpox. Commanders also appointed mayors and local councilors and empowered them to hire laborers. Control of patronage jobs strengthened the hand of pro-American politicians and administrators.[13] The ability of the occupiers to offer ordinary Filipinos a better life greatly facilitated the COIN campaign. Military operations against the guerrillas still had to be mounted, but even these benefited from local cooperation. Units of Filipino scouts, who spoke the local language and knew the terrain, aided the American force. One such unit captured Aguinaldo, helping bring the insurgency to a successful conclusion. A generous amnesty offered to surrendered guerrillas, many of whom eventually served in local or national government, removed a source of further unrest.

The Philippine campaign does not provide a blueprint for successful COIN. The insurgency occurred primarily within a single ethnic group on only two islands. The U.S. Navy ensured that few supplies reached the guerrillas, who had no safe haven across a friendly border into which they could retreat. Brutality marked the early stages of the American response and never completely disappeared. Across the four operational areas, commanders approached the insurgency very differently. These issues notwithstanding, the soldiers and civilian administrators devised a highly effective COIN strategy and conducted a campaign still worth

studying. Unfortunately, the Army did not preserve the lessons of the conflict and, by the Vietnam War, had all but forgotten them.

### The Marines in Latin America

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, the U.S. Marine Corps had acquired so much experience in irregular warfare that it might have become the nation's COIN force. Most of its operations took place in Central America and the Caribbean. Between 1898 and 1940, the Marines intervened in Cuba, Panama, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Nicaragua. While the United States had always had strong strategic interest in the region, this interest increased dramatically in the early twentieth century for two main reasons. Construction of the Panama Canal led the military to view the Caribbean islands as a forward defense zone for the strategic waterway. In addition, the race to colonize the globe's last remaining "open" spaces made both Republican and Democratic administrations fearful that a European power might take advantage of local instability to plant its flag in Latin America. Desire to protect economic interests in the region further encouraged a policy of interventionism, known as "gun-boat diplomacy."

This misleading term obscures the complex nature of interventions. The Marines did not simply show up in heavily armed vessels to impose U.S. will by brute force. They supervised elections, ended civil wars, and tried to promote stability in the region. These campaigns required creative responses to conflict, addressing causes of unrest and working with local people to quell disturbances. Given the size of the Marine Corps and the American dislike for undeclared wars, the Marines had to supplement their small contingents with local levies and to end conflicts quickly at minimal cost in blood (both American and indigenous) and treasure.[14] Although they never faced a full-blown insurgency, the Marines did develop effective COIN methods. A great deal can be learned from these interventions without endorsing the jingoism that fueled them. The 1926–33 intervention in Nicaragua or, rather, one small part of it, the Rio Coco operation, provides a particularly good example of effective COIN practice.

#### *Nicaragua*

America's first involvement in Nicaragua, which began in 1910 and ended in 1934, stemmed neither from enlightened policy nor from sound strategy, and it certainly sowed bitter seeds that Nicaraguans continue to reap. And yet, a small episode of this sordid affair provides a useful case study on how to conduct COIN operations.

Desire to protect the Panama Canal and keep foreign interests out of Nicaragua led the United States to intervene in support of a rebellion to

overthrow an anti-American leader in 1910. President Jose Santos Zelaya bowed to the inevitable, giving way to the pro-American conservative Adolfo Diaz. As soon as the Marines left Managua, however, the new President faced another rebellion, which brought the leathernecks back, this time to remain for more than a decade. For the next 13 years, a small legation guard of 100 Americans supported a string of friendly Nicaraguan administrations.[15]

By the mid 1920s, however, American and international opinion had become less favorable toward intervention. Following the Nicaraguan election of 1925, the Coolidge Administration withdrew the legation guard. Trouble soon followed as the right wing General Emiliano Chamorro staged a coup. The United States refused to recognize the take-over, and civil war between liberals and conservatives broke out. Finding the resulting chaos unacceptable and seeing no other way to resolve it, the Coolidge administration intervened once more, sending both a contingent of Marines and diplomat Henry L. Stimson to mediate the dispute. Within a month of his arrival in April 1927, Stimson had gotten the desired resolution. Unfortunately for all, one holdout opposed the deal and launched a rebellion of his own against the new government.

Augusto Sandino proved to be one of the most able insurgent leaders of the twentieth century. Like most revolutionaries, he suffered conventional defeats at the outset of his campaign before switching to guerrilla operations, which he conducted masterfully. Sandino took advantage of Nicaragua's terrain, highly favorable for guerrilla warfare. A mountain chain divides the country into Pacific and Atlantic regions that also reflect an ethnic divide. The Spanish speakers concentrated on the Pacific side made up the bulk of the population. European settlers dominated the few towns on the Atlantic coast inhabited by Miskito Indians who also occupied the interior along with the indigenous Sunu people. Most American-led economic activity (mining and fruit production) took place in the Atlantic region. Sandino based his operations in the north-central province of Nuevo Segovia adjacent to both the Honduran border and the boundary between Atlantic and Pacific Nicaragua. He thus had a safe haven across an international frontier and easy access to the populated west and the economically rich east of the country.

At least one American officer, however, saw in Nicaragua's complex physical and human landscape an opportunity as well as a challenge. Marine Captain Merritt "Red Mike" Edson left Panama with a small contingent for Puerto Cabezas to deal with the deteriorating situation in Nicaragua. Edson believed that dominating the Rio Coco valley offered the best chance of countering Sandino. This 400-mile river runs from the interior of the country along the Honduran border to the Caribbean Sea. Edson thought it might be used an avenue of invasion into Sandino

territory and a means of blocking the insurgents' movement between eastern and western Nicaragua. To control the river, he would need to befriend the native population and hire some of them as river guides, boatmen, and interpreters. Given the animosity the Indians felt toward the Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans, Edson had reason to be optimistic about his plan.

Edson proposed a three-phased operation. He would first lead a reconnaissance mission up the Rio Coco, garrison the lower reaches of the river, and then launch an offensive operation deep into Sandino territory coordinated with military operations out of Managua. Edson accomplished the first two goals and to a lesser extent the third. Deep penetration raids achieved limited results, which the Marines could not sustain due to a shortage of troops. Manpower shortages coupled with a vacillating policy proved the undoing of an otherwise sound strategy. Garrisoning the river valley depended on friendly relations with the natives, which could only be achieved if the locals believed the Marines would stay and protect them. His inability to make this promise hampered Edson's effort to get information and hire guides and boatmen, who understandably feared retaliation once the Americans left. This reluctance to cooperate coupled with his desperate need for labor led the captain to press natives into service against their will, further undermining his efforts to gain their trust.

The Hoover administration, not Sandino, ultimately undid Edson's work. Following the onset of the Great Depression, Washington decided to cut costs, withdraw the Marines, and hand over responsibility for security to the Nicaraguan National Guard and its American officers. This decision allowed the insurgents to reassert control along the Rio Coco and in much of the Atlantic region. Treachery ultimately ended the insurgency. During Sandino's participation in peace talks in Managua in 1934, National Guard General Anastasio Somoza abducted and murdered him along with his brother and other insurgent leaders. In 1936, Somoza seized power. He and his sons would rule the country, directly or indirectly, until the Sandinistas, a new revolutionary group named for the slain guerrilla leader, seized power in 1979.

The sporadic, inconsistent U.S. policy toward Nicaragua and the country's subsequent history preclude considering the early twentieth-century intervention as a success. However, Edson based his operations on sound COIN principles worth studying. To begin with, he understood the concept of "hearts and minds" even if he did not use the term. "It was my belief," Edson later wrote, "that, if we were to succeed in our mission of eradicating the bandit element in Nicaragua, we should make every effort to gain the friendliness and cooperation of the peaceful citizenry."[16] He also recognized the importance of living among the people and learning their language and customs. Finally, Edson appreciated the need

to protect people from insurgent reprisals to encourage their cooperation. Given the requisite number of troops and the necessary political backing, he would have placed small garrisons in towns up and down the Rio Coco. Using friendly people from one ethnic group against insurgents from another might have worked *if* the Americans had remained in the country long enough to win the conflict. Such a strategy had succeeded in the Philippines. Stirring up ethnic tensions without a long-term commitment, however, sewed bitter seeds whose harvest the Miskito Indians would reap for years to come.[17]

### The *Small Wars Manual*

The Marines not only amassed a great deal of experience in COIN, they preserved it in doctrine. Published in 1940, the *Small Wars Manual* contains a great deal of insight still applicable today, even though much of its tactical instruction is obsolete. The book grew directly out of the Nicaraguan experience. Edson's immediate superior, Major (later Lt. Colonel) Harold H. Utley went on to write *Small Wars Operations,* to which Edson himself contributed information on the Coco Patrol. The Marines developed this book into the *Small Wars Manual.*[18]

The *Manual* begins with a clear discussion of the nature of internal conflicts and sober recognition of the limits of force to resolve them. "The application of purely military measures may not, by itself, restore peace and orderly government," the opening chapter instructed, "because the fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economical, political, or social."[19] Even when the civil administration can no longer handle unrest, military measures "must be of secondary importance and should be applied only to such an extent as to permit the continuation of peaceful corrective measures."[20] To be successful, small wars strategy had to be adapted to the unique circumstance of each country and the character of its people.[21]

The *Manual* advocated effective cooperation with the civil administration and sensitivity to local culture and religion. It also insisted on respect for national and international law and stressed that all ranks had to maintain good relations with the local people.

> Every effort should be made to assure the civilian population of the friendliness of our forces. No effort should be spared to demonstrate the advantage of law and order and to secure their friendly cooperation. All ranks should be kept mindful of the mission to be accomplished, the necessity for adhering to the policy of the United States and of observing the law of nations.[22]

The collective experience of the Army and Marines from 1898 to 1940 and its preservation in the *Small Wars Manual* reveal important truths about the U.S. military and unconventional war. Contrary to popular

belief, the armed forces have a long and successful tradition of COIN operations. American soldiers have proven as capable as any in adapting to the rigors of unconventional warfare. Had history unfolded differently, the Marine Corps might well have become an international police force fighting America's small wars around the globe. However, U.S. military culture has been shaped not by any single event or series of events but by the preponderance of its experience. That experience would soon become large-scale conventional war to such an extent that it would overshadow all that came before. The lessons of the era of small wars would soon be forgotten.

## WORLD WAR II AND THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN AMERICAN MILITARY

The Second World War created the Army and Marine Corps that exist today. Previous wars had seen the ground forces expand for a conflict and contract once it ended. The Army that marched to the Elbe and the Marine Corps that island-hopped through the Pacific never downsized to the degree they had following previous wars. The United States did demobilize in 1945 but was quickly rearmed with the onset of the Cold War and the outbreak of the Korean Conflict. The way in which the U.S. military fought World War II shaped its character to the present. The approach it took to fighting and winning the global conventional war ultimately inhibited its ability to conduct COIN operations.

Few military planners at home or abroad realized the enormous war-making potential of the United States. One who did planned the attack that would force the country to turn that potential into reality. Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto had been educated at Harvard and traveled throughout the country. After Pearl Harbor, he concluded Japan would have six months to a year of freedom in the South Pacific before being overwhelmed by the oil wells of Texas and the factories of Detroit. The American Army alone expanded from just under 200,000 in September 1930 to over 8 million in 1945.[23] The country managed this dramatic expansion while running its armaments industry full tilt, supplying as well as funding its allies.

Resources and manpower allowed the United States to employ a strategy of abundance.[24] Firepower and material encouraged the belief that overwhelming force provided the key to victory. In Europe, the American Army did not so much outfight the *Wehrmacht* as out-produce it, winning what the Germans called the *materialschlacht*, the battle of supply. The saga of the Sherman tank illustrates this principle. This cheap, fuel efficient, and versatile tank was hopelessly under-armored and outgunned by the German Tiger. In France and the low countries, it took four

Shermans to knock out one Tiger. Three would be destroyed so that one could get behind the German panzer for a kill shot at its only vulnerable point, the rear. However, the United States could easily afford to replace the lost Shermans, which the Germans could not do with their Tigers.

World War II also demonstrated the potential of technology to compensate for traditional mass (number of troops on the battlefield). Concerned about the size of the forces necessary to conquer the Japanese home islands and the enormous loss of life on both sides that such an operation would entail, the United States deployed the atomic weapons it had been developing during the war. The two bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki promptly ended the conflict, ushered in the nuclear age, and reinforced an American penchant for gadgetry. The new weapon also provided a ready answer to the challenge of the Cold War that would soon follow.

## AMERICA'S ARMED FORCES AND THE COLD WAR

After 1945, the United States demobilized much of its wartime military, but not to the extent it had done in previous wars. By 1950 the active service component of the armed services numbered 1,454,000 with the Army at 591,000 and the Marines at 75,000.[25] Larger than any peacetime establishment in American history, the force was woefully inadequate to the tasks it had been given. The Berlin Blockade began the Cold War in Europe and revealed the vulnerability of the West. Asked to devise a plan to protect Western Europe in the event of a Soviet attack, Eisenhower concluded he could defend the Pyrenees. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), created in 1949, promised to supplement U.S. strength but could not offset the assets of the Warsaw Pact formed to counter it. Mao Zedong's 1949 victory in China confronted the United States with another communist superpower in the Far East at the same time that it lost its nuclear monopoly when the Soviets acquired the bomb in 1949.

The Truman administration had just devised a strategy for dealing with the new situation when events overtook planning. On April 14, 1950, the National Security Council (NSC) released its study of the communist threat and how to respond to it. NSC-68 viewed international security as a Manichean struggle between the U.S.-led free world and communism spearheaded by China and the Soviet Union. The top secret report called for a massive military buildup to counter this threat.[26] Before its recommendations could be implemented, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. The United States survived the onslaught and rolled back the invasion. By the time of the armistice in 1953, the army alone numbered more than the entire pre-conflict military, 1.5 million soldiers. By 1958 it had shrunk to an active force of under 900,000 with another 1.5 million reserve and National Guard troops,

which could be mobilized in the event of war.[27] Creation of Germany's *Bundeswehr* augmented NATO troop strength in Europe. However, Warsaw Pact Forces still greatly outnumbered alliance forces. The United States vowed to offset the imbalance with tactical and, if necessary, strategic nuclear weapons.

## COIN AND THE COLD WAR

The United States had thus created a massive conventional army organized around heavy armored divisions backed by tactical and strategic air power, including nuclear weapons. Policy makers had also given it a clear if daunting task: defend Western Europe by deterring and, if necessary, countering a Soviet attack through the Fulda Gap in Central Germany and defend South Korea against renewed aggression by North Korea and/or China. During this period the U.S. military, or at least elements of it, did participate in unconventional wars. However, these conflicts proved to be atypical and led observers to draw mistaken conclusions about COIN.

The Greek Civil War (1946–49) pitted communist insurgents against a government supported by the United States. During the first year of the conflict, the British defended the country they had liberated from the Germans, allowing its weak democratic government to prepare for the protracted struggle. Unable to continue the effort, Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that Britain would terminate aid to Greece in March 1947. Alarmed by communist takeovers of neighboring Albania and Yugoslavia, the administration of President Harry Truman stepped into the breach with $723.6 million in aid and 1,500 advisers, including 800 military personnel.[28] Acting through the Joint Advising and Planning Group created in December 1947, the Americans trained Greek forces and directed the COIN campaign. "The American military strategy was largely conventional," one scholar concluded, "To pin down Democratic Army [insurgent] forces with massed troops and overwhelming firepower, and systematically to clear the adversary from mountain redoubts."[29] Though essentially correct, this assessment oversimplifies the American approach. U.S. advisors criticized Greek forces for over-reliance on artillery, insisting that the infantry move in to fix the enemy so that firepower could destroy them, but it did advocate large unit operations and aggressive tactics.[30]

This conventional approach, which under different circumstances would have cost the government popular support, succeeded largely because of insurgent mistakes and fortuitous circumstances. Believing that conditions favored moving to the phase of mobile war in Mao's model, the communists reorganized their forces from small bands of 50

to 100 into "brigades" and "divisions."[31] These larger formations could be more easily targeted by the regular Greek forces supported by the Americans. The following year, the communist governments of Yugoslavia and Albania closed their borders to the insurgents, depriving them of the safe havens and supply bases they had enjoyed. Thus with minimal attention to winning hearts and minds, the Greeks achieved a conventional military victory over an unconventional foe.

A similar strategy defeated insurgents on the Korean peninsula between 1945 and 1953. Communist agitators remained in the South following division of the country after World War II. The Republic of Korea and its American advisors adopted a two-pronged strategy to defeat the insurgents: forced relocation of the civilian population from threatened rural communities and aggressive search-and-destroy missions that entailed encircling and clearing large areas at a time.[32] In most cases such tactics would have been counterproductive, but the Korean environment made the insurgents so desperate for supplies that this approach very nearly worked.[33] The conventional war that began with the North Korean invasion in June 1950 inadvertently destroyed the insurgency. Believing that the invaders would triumph (which they very nearly did), the insurgents came out in the open to support them and suffered defeat themselves. For the remainder of the conflict, the irregular threat was reduced to a matter of easily handled rear-area security. Korea, however, seemed to offer further evidence that a conventional approach to unconventional war could work.

The last such case occurred where American COIN experience had arguably begun: the Philippines. During the Japanese occupation, the Philippine Communist Party created a military arm, The Peoples Army against the Japanese, whose Filipino acronym is Hukbalahap, usually shortened to "Huk." The Huk Revolt (1946–54) fed on widespread rural poverty and grossly inequitable distribution of wealth. Failure of the government to engage in much needed land reform and the Philippine Army's reliance on conventional operations that included reprisals against innocent civilians fed the unrest. The United States did encourage the creation of an Economic Development Corps to do civic action, but this approach proved far less effective than military assistance proffered through the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group. At the end of the day, relentless military pressure, not a hearts-and-minds campaign, broke the back of the insurgency.[34]

Three large-scale internal conflicts thus seemed to offer the same lesson: an unconventional enemy could be defeated by conventional means suitably adapted to the circumstances. The American dictum, "Find 'em, Fight 'em, Finish 'em" had produced results.[35] Closer examination, however, reveals that all three conflicts had characteristics in

common that would set them apart from other COIN campaigns. Each took place predominantly in a rural area where insurgent guerrillas could be isolated from their civilian supporters and where scrutiny of military action was not as intense as it would have been in a city. None of the insurgents enjoyed a safe haven across a friendly border. The Philippines are an archipelago, and both Greece and South Korea occupy the southern terminus of a peninsula. The Greek communists had initially benefited from sanctuary and support provided by Albania and Yugoslavia but lost this advantage when these countries closed their borders in 1949. Finally, in two of the insurgencies (Greece and Korea), the guerrillas committed themselves to conventional operations in which American firepower destroyed them.

The Army did not, however, completely misunderstand the nature of insurgency. *FM 31-20: Operations Against Guerrilla Forces,* published in 1951, grasped the nature of a Maoist people's war and advocated a comprehensive strategy emphasizing the primacy of politics, the need for civil development, and the importance of intelligence gathering. It also encouraged aggressive military tactics and sanctioned draconian measures including reprisals against civilian communities believed to be aiding the guerrillas.[36] Judging by the American approach in Vietnam, this single manual had little impact on a military establishment committed to firepower and maneuver. In his classic 1957 work, *Limited War: the Challenge to American Strategy,* Robert Osgood commented on the U.S. military's limited experience with the selective use of force and suggested that there was something un-American about limited war.[37] Lecturing on the British experience in Malaya at the U.S. Marine Corps Command and General Staff College in 1962, a British officer encountered a dismissive response to his discussion of Britain's long-haul, low-cost approach. Commenting on how he thought the U.S. military would win in Vietnam, one officer concluded: "We will work them over with so much steel that six months will see the end of it."[38] Many politicians shared this simplistic view. "We, of the Free World, won in Greece," concluded Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., in 1964, "and we can win in Vietnam."[39]

## THE VIETNAM WAR

Unlike any of America's previous wars, Vietnam (1954–73) was a hybrid war involving operations across the conflict spectrum, including conventional battles, partisan warfare in support of regular operations, and classic insurgency.[40] U.S. forces concentrated on the conventional aspects of the struggle, and this emphasis influenced its handling of the irregular ones. As in Greece, Korea, and the Philippines, Americans adopted a primarily conventional approach to COIN.

The United States inherited the Vietnam War from the French, who withdrew following a crushing defeat at Dien Ben Phu in 1954, ceding the north to the communists and creating a democratic republic in the south. Concerned about the spread of communism in the region, the United States stepped in to support South Vietnam and inherited a colonial war in the process. From 1956 to 1958, the United States revamped the poorly equipped, trained, and led South Vietnamese force of 200,000 into an effective conventional army of 150,000. Working through its Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG), the United States spent $85 million a year to create six heavy and four light divisions.[41] This force structure reflected the realistic assessment that a conventional invasion from the north posed the greatest threat to South Vietnam.[42] Within three years, however, all four light divisions (those best suited for COIN) had been dismantled even though an invasion from the north had become less likely.[43]

In addition to revamping the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the United States concentrated on building and supporting a stable government in Saigon. Drawing a bad lesson from the Huk Revolt, the United States concluded that a strongman in the mold of Philippine Defense Minister, later President, Ramon Magsaysay could best protect the country from external and internal threats.[44] Experience in Latin America, where the United States found dictators who promoted stability and protected American economic interests from the vagaries of democracy, may also have encouraged this belief. In South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem emerged as the strongman. Although the French described him as a megalomaniac, Diem enjoyed Washington's full support when he became premier in 1954. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles portrayed him as "competent, anti-Communist, and vigorous."[45] Dulles might also have added what President Roosevelt had said about Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." Far from making the country more secure, Diem helped create the conditions upon which insurgency thrives. He refused to countenance land reform, expressed contempt for democracy, appointed cronies to lucrative positions, and showed little sensitivity to the Buddhist religion practiced by the majority of Vietnamese (Diem was Catholic). To avoid a confrontation with the United States, the North Vietnamese had instructed communist cells in the south to lay low until more favorable circumstances developed; Diem created those circumstances.[46]

Poor political leadership adversely affected the performance of the ARVN, which proved ineffective at either COIN or the conventional operations for which it had been created. As the security situation worsened, Washington saw no alternative to direct intervention if it wished to prevent communist takeover of the south. Beginning in early 1965, the

U.S. military shifted from an advisory role to direct control of operations. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), which had absorbed the MAAG in February 1962, eventually numbered 543,000 troops. Because the mission had originally been one of assistance, however, the force had a low "tooth-to-tail" ratio (number of combat troops to support troops). Only 80,000 of the half-million-plus deployment consisted of combat troops.[47]

The armed forces entered Vietnam in the midst of a doctrinal controversy that would adversely affect the conduct of operations. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy took office determined to reverse the cautious policies of the Eisenhower administration. He would counter Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's support for "wars of national liberation" by aiding threatened democracies in the third world. To accomplish this goal he wanted a military that embraced COIN as a core task. "Flexible Response," the ability to conduct operations across the entire conflict spectrum would replace "massive retaliation," the rigid doctrine of the Eisenhower years that saw nuclear deterrence as the best response to any threat. Enamored of Special Forces, Kennedy authorized use of the emblematic green beret and urged the army to develop COIN doctrine and training. The generals supported this initiative to a point, accepting the need for doctrine and agreeing to expand the Special Forces, but resisting pressure to transform the army as whole. "Our primary interest must be in Europe," concluded Army Chief of Staff General George H. Decker, "we could lose in Asia without losing everything, but to lose in Europe would be fatal."[48]

Given the disaster that befell the Army in Vietnam, it would be easy to condemn Decker. His assessment was, however, correct. Even at its height, Vietnam would remain a sideshow. However, disagreement within the military created a somewhat schizophrenic approach to the war with Special Forces and some Marine units engaging in successful COIN operations, while the bulk of MACV took a conventional approach to the conflict. The Special Forces Center at Fort Bragg produced good COIN manuals, but these works had a limited impact on the Army as whole.[49] The conventional approach also seeped into unconventional doctrine. *FM 3-16: Counterguerrilla Operations* advocated use of "flush" operations in which troops would contain a 1,000 square meter area that would then be pounded with artillery and aerial bombardment, driving those who survived the barrage into the guns of the surrounding infantry.[50] The author of the official army study of COIN doctrine concluded that throughout the 1960s the U.S. Army would "move inextricably towards a more expansive use of firepower." Asked what he thought the answer to insurgency should be, MACV Commander General William Westmoreland responded, "firepower"; his boss,

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, set "body count" as the best measure of military effectiveness.[51] Many in Washington supported the conventional approach. A popular quip making the rounds at the time concluded, "Get 'em by the balls, and their hearts and minds will follow." The United States dropped 8 million tons of bombs on Vietnam, half of them on the South, more than twice what the United States and Britain combined dropped during World War II, and still lost the war.[52]

While emphasis on firepower alienated ordinary Vietnamese, often driving them into the arms of the Viet Cong, failure to understand the nature of the insurgency led to overemphasis on fixing and destroying insurgent guerrilla units and on interdicting supplies from the North. Marine Major General Victor H. Krulak argued against MACV's wasteful search-and-destroy missions through the Central Highlands and challenged its emphasis on interdicting the Ho Chi Minh trail when the insurgency in the South seemed largely self-sustaining. Instead, he advocated pacification programs in the densely populated Mekong Delta and coastal plane, where 90 percent of the people lived. Krulak proposed a strategy to secure villages under Viet Cong control to separate the insurgents from their base of support in the rural population. Conventional thinking so dominated the Pentagon, however, that Krulak's ideas never received a fair hearing.[53]

Although they could not alter fundamental strategy, those officers who advocated application of proven COIN methods did succeed in developing a scaled-down pacification program. Dubbed "the other war," pacification included a range of efforts aimed at protecting civilians and winning their support. The Strategic Hamlet program copied from the Malayan Emergency a strategy that relocated villages dominated by insurgents into fortified compounds with improved amenities such as running water and medical clinics. Unfortunately, the Americans misapplied this effective strategy. Sir Robert Thompson, head of the British Advisory Mission in Saigon, urged the Americans and South Vietnamese to move slowly, establishing hamlets in areas that could be secured easily and then building on that success. Eager for quick results, MACV and the Saigon government built the hamlets rapidly and situated many where they cold not be defended.[54]

The Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons (CAPS) proved far more effective. Building on the experience of Latin America during the interwar period, the Marines combined a rifle squad (12–15 men) with a South Vietnamese Popular Forces (militia created to defend villages) platoon (30 men). They would live together within the village, getting to know the locals, building trust, gathering intelligence, and aggressively patrolling at night. The CAPs units won the trust of local communities.[55]

The Phoenix Program also produced impressive results. Under the direction of William Colby, Central Intelligence Agency operatives working with the South Vietnamese targeted the insurgent political structure. By the end of the war they had killed 26,000 Viet Cong, captured 33,000, and persuaded 22,000 of the captured to work with the government against their former comrades. The program considered it greatest success those it won over, not those it killed.[56]

A few successful programs will not, however, win a war. Robert Thompson described the American approach as "haphazard." "The real problem," he concluded, "was to get the Americans and South Vietnamese to work out and adopt an overall strategic plan of campaign."[57] The United States moved in the direction of a unified approach with the creation of an office of Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) under Robert Komer in 1967. CORDS combined CAPS, Phoenix, and other elements of pacification under a single roof. In June 1968, General Creighton Abrams replaced William Westmoreland as commander of MACV. Abrams switched the emphasis from conventional operations to pacification and its counterpart, Vietnamization, the handing over of security responsibility to local forces. Returning to Saigon as a White House consultant, Thompson noted that, properly coordinated and as part of a comprehensive COIN campaign, the Strategic Hamlet Program was finally working.[58]

Whether the new strategy could have succeeded had it been tried earlier remains a hotly contested issue. By 1968, following the infamous Tet offensive, the new approach offered too little too late. The ARVN performed well enough with logistic and air support from the U.S. to defeat a North Vietnamese invasion in 1972, but collapsed under a new assault three years later after the U.S. had withdrawn such support. At the very least, failure to mount an effective COIN campaign contributed profoundly to the American failure in Southeast Asia.

## U.S. ARMED FORCES IN THE SHADOW OF VIETNAM

The experience of Vietnam has profoundly affected the U.S. military to the present. Rather than absorb the war's lessons into a revised doctrine, the army recoiled from the very notion of COIN. At first glance this response might seem like denial. Some officers never did grasp the true nature of the Vietnam War. "You never defeated us on the battlefield," Colonel Harry Summers told a communist officer. "That may be so," the Vietnamese replied. "It is also irrelevant."[59] Many American officers, however, understood the complexity of the conflict and reached a reasonable conclusion. Nothing in the tragic war altered the fundamental premise of American strategy: in addition to protecting the homeland,

defending Europe remained the first priority followed closely by protecting South Korea (and along with it, Japan). It made no more sense to revamp the military for COIN in 1975 than it had a decade before when General Decker opposed the idea. Add to these considerations demoralization in the army (some of its own officers called it "broken") and the end of the draft, and the military response to Vietnam makes sense. The United States adopted a one-and-one-half war contingency plan that it would have to implement with a smaller force: develop the ability to fight a full-scale war in Europe while conducting a holding action on the Korean peninsula.

The military recognized that unconventional threats would not go away, but it decided to handle them differently. Speaking at a press conference in Guam on November 3, 1969, President Richard Nixon announced what would come to be called the "Nixon Doctrine." The United States would continue to support its allies but would not deploy American combat troops to do so. "We shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments," the President promised, "But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense."[60] Over the next decade, military doctrine would reflect this change. The 1976 version of the Army's basic manual, *FM 100-5: Field Operations* omitted any mention of COIN.[61] "Low-Intensity Conflict" became the new operational term for everything below conventional war. *FM 100-20: Low-Intensity Conflict* (1981) maintained that military assistance to governments threatened by insurgency would be provided by a Military Advisory Group, which would include a Special Forces Mobile Training Team, as part of "Foreign Aid for Internal Defense."[62] For the remainder of the Cold War and well into the 1990s, the military insisted on a purely advisory role. "Only in exceptional cases where major US interests are at high risk will US military forces be committed to combat," *Joint Publication 3-07: Doctrine for Joint Operations in Low-intensity Conflict* (1994) declared.[63]

The Nixon Doctrine profoundly shaped the post-Vietnam Army and helps explain why it entered Iraq in 2003 with little preparation for COIN. Foreign Aid for Internal Defense made COIN a specialist's job of little concern to regular soldiers. Special Forces would be assigned a broad range of tasks, including supporting insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. Vietnam had so degraded the preparedness of units for conventional war that the Pentagon understandably wished to avoid any such future engagement. By 1972, drug use, low morale, and lack of discipline had become so bad that the army rated only four of its 13 active divisions "combat ready."[64] The Army would have to be rebuilt as an effective conventional fighting force. Downsizing, budget cuts, and the end of

the draft in 1973 guaranteed that the new army would be a small, all-volunteer force supported by reserve units as part of the "total force concept." Such an army could ill afford to divert resources or manpower to train for, nevermind conduct, large-scale COIN operations, which most officers agreed eroded conventional war-fighting skills.

The U.S. military of the 1970s also derived lessons from contemporary conflicts, which underscored the need to keep the army tightly focused on conventional operations. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War Egyptian forces along the Suez Canal and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights overwhelmed Israeli units in well-coordinated surprise attacks. Only a massive infusion of U.S. military aid kept Israel from being overrun (or from using its nuclear weapons to prevent defeat). The Middle East conflict offered two compelling lessons: the speed and firepower of modern forces precluded time to mobilize reserves, and firepower enhanced by technology could still trump numbers.[65] The first lesson increased American anxiety over the disparity of forces facing one another across the Fulda Gap in Germany. NATO had never been able to match the Warsaw Pact in numbers of troops, tanks, and artillery pieces. Now it could not even count on a delaying action to buy time while the United States mobilized its reserves and conscripted new soldiers. The increase in the total number of Soviet tanks and the replacement of older models with T-62s and T-72s added to American concern.[66] The second lesson, the ability of technology to increase firepower and offset superior numbers, offered some hope that Western Europe could be defended without resorting to nuclear weapons.

The Army devised its "big five" weapons program to support its primary mission in Europe as stated in the revised version of *FM 100-5 Operations:* "fight outnumbered and win."[67] The big five centered on the Abrams main battle tank (MI and MIA), which would at least match and probably out-perform the latest Soviet models. The lighter, more mobile Bradley fighting vehicle would transport troops to the field and support them with antitank and machine-gun fire. The Apache attack helicopter would support tanks, fighting vehicles, and infantry. Its sister aircraft, the Blackhawk utility helicopter, would transport soldiers and equipment (including a 105 mm howitzer slung beneath it) to the battlefield. The final member of the big five, the Patriot missile battery, would protect ground forces from air attack.[68]

The officer corps that revamped the post-Vietnam army also worried that an all-volunteer force would be less representative of American society and diminish public support in time of war. The "total force" concept provided the answer to this dilemma. The active duty military would consist of 16 divisions on paper. To deploy all of these divisions, however, the President would have to mobilize the reserves. At the same

time that the reserves became a vital part of the new force structure, their role grew more limited. In previous wars, reservists trained for combat. The increasing cost and complexity of high-tech weapons systems precluded part-time soldiers becoming proficient in using them. Reserves would be called upon to provide logistics and other support functions.[69] Their full-time civilian employment might even equip them to fulfill some of these tasks better than active-duty soldiers. The concept would work well *provided* the reserves operated in rear areas during a conventional war. Deploying them during an insurgency, on the other hand, would make them easy targets.

The Marines emerged from Vietnam less scathed than the Army. As the nation's expeditionary force they did not have responsibility for static defense in any theater and so could be more flexible. They had a long COIN tradition and had pioneered the highly successful Combined Action Platoons. Like the Army, though, they remained an overwhelmingly conventional force. Despite their experience in unconventional warfare they entered Lebanon in 1983 unprepared for the complex conflict raging there and suffered a devastating attack on their barracks in Beirut.

## GROWTH OF SPECIAL FORCES

Elite units have existed for as long as professional armies, but they have generally operated with or in support of regular forces. The U.S. Army in the Philippines and the Marines in Latin America created ad hoc formations for unconventional warfare. The British were perhaps the first to create Special Forces specifically for COIN. They revived the Special Air Service (SAS), which had engaged in long-range reconnaissance and out-of-area operations during World War II, to pursue communist insurgents in the jungles of Malaya. The United States stood up the 10th Special Forces Group in 1952 and other such formations soon after. President Kennedy authorized the units to wear their emblematic green berets, giving Army Special Forces their popular name. Kennedy also approved creation of U.S. Navy Sea Air Land Teams (SEAL).

Special Operations Forces (SOF) expanded dramatically as part of the Kennedy administration's emphasis on COIN. In Vietnam they played a prominent role in pacification. However, the SOF community experienced the deepest cuts in the postwar army, declining from 13,000 in 1969 to just 3,000 in 1980. This decline left them woefully under strength for the enhanced advisory role the Nixon Doctrine required of them. President Ronald Reagan and his successor George H. W. Bush made expanding SOF a priority in the defense buildup of the 1980s, increasing the total contingent to 11,600 in 1981, 14,900 in 1985, and 20,900 in 1990.[70]

The SOF community received an enormous boost with the passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. To facilitate joint operations conducted by units from all of the armed services, the act enhanced the power of the combatant commanders at the expense of service chiefs of staff. The commander of Central Command, for example, would have operational control over Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force units within his area of operation. Goldwater-Nichols also created a Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to oversee all U.S. SOF under the direction of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. By the mid-1990s, SOCOM included 46,000 troops. The Army contingent of 30,000 consisted of Green Berets, Rangers, psychological warfare groups, and one Civil Affairs battalion (later increased to two). The Navy contributed 5,500 SEALs, and the Air Force, 9,500 Air Commandos.[71] The Marines kept direct control of their Force Reconnaissance units until 2006, when Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stood up the Marine Special Forces Command as part of SOCOM. Located within SOCOM, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) fields Delta Force, Seal Team 6, and other specialized units tasked with the most sensitive "Black" (covert) operations. Inclusion of Ranger battalions, generally regarded as elite infantry rather than true Special Forces, makes the effective size of the SOF community appear larger than it really is. The Army's five SOF groups (the Green Berets) and the bulk of the SEALs performed most of the military's COIN tasks before the Iraq war.

The expansion of SOF and their enhanced COIN role had significant effects, both positive and negative, for the short and long term. The expansion allowed the United States to deploy 260 SOF Mobile Military Training Teams to 35 countries from 1980 to 1986.[72] Using this approach the United States supported the government of El Salvador against Marxist insurgents and Nicaraguan insurgents against the Marxist Sandinista government. As controversial as both operations were, neither could have been mounted had they required large conventional deployments. On the other hand, small advisory teams had little or no control over the behavior of the local forces they advised. Both the Nicaraguan Contras and the Salvadoran Army committed atrocities against civilians. The worst excess occurred in 1981, when the American-trained Atlacatl Battalion massacred 700 men, women, and children in the Salvadoran village of El Mozote. The Salvadoran government understood full well that the Reagan administration placed a higher priority on containing communism than it did on promoting human rights in Latin America.[73]

The creation of SOCOM further separated conventional from unconventional warfare in the U.S. military. Conventional warriors now had even less reason to study and train for COIN. They also resented the diversion of valuable resources to the SOF community for the handful of

missions they actually conducted during the 1980s. Regular soldiers often harbored distrust if not outright hostility toward SOF warriors whom they saw as undisciplined mavericks. During the Cold War an unhealthy interest in SOF could shorten an officer's career, since promotion to full colonel and beyond went to those who had commanded conventional units.

## THE WEINBERGER-POWELL DOCTRINE AND THE GULF WAR

The emphasis on conventional war fighting to the exclusion of virtually all other missions received further encouragement from the articulation of a new strategic concept to accompany the structural changes put in place by the Reagan administration. Developed by Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger and implemented by General Colin Powell, Weinberger's Senior Military Assistant who became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989, the Weinberger Doctrine laid down six tests or principals to govern the use of military force. First, the United States should not resort to war "unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest or that of our allies." Second, if the United States decides to fight it must fight to win, deploying the requisite number of troops adequately equipped for the job. Third, every military mission should have "clearly defined political and military objectives." Fourth, the relationship between the forces deployed and the political objectives must be continually reassessed. Fifth, before any administration deployed troops it must have "some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress." Sixth, military force should be used only "as a last resort."[74] Colin Powell would later conclude that "Weinberger's rules turned out to be a practical guide."[75]

The Weinberger Doctrine grew out of the bitter experience of Vietnam and fit the exegeses of the 1980s. The military missions of that era seemed to confirm its wisdom. U.S. Marines deployed to help Lebanon in 1983 lacked a clear mission and adequate resources. The bombing of their barracks in Beirut on October 23, 1983, killed 299 Marines and led to American withdrawal. In contrast, the invasions of Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989) and the air raid on Libya (1986) conformed to Weinberger's requirements of a clear mission, adequate resources, and public support. The Doctrine kept the United States from diverting resources and attention from its primary Cold War missions, defense of Europe and the Korean Peninsula. For all its benefits, the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine would breed a generation of cautious officers who would have real difficulty in the ambiguous missions of the post–Cold War world.

### Desert Storm and the Vindication of Conventional Strategy

The revitalizing and reorganization of the U.S. military in the aftermath of Vietnam produced stunning results in an unexpected theater. In August 1990, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait. In January 1991, The United States led a coalition of 500,000 troops to expel him in less than 100 days of fighting and with fewer than 100 U.S. casualties. Many observers gleefully proclaimed that the ghosts of Vietnam had finally been exorcised. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union also seemed to vindicate the defense buildup of the Reagan-Bush years. Deterrence had prevented war, and the arms race had driven the Soviets into bankruptcy.

## A DECADE OF DRIFT

The triumph of American conventional military power reached in the Iraqi desert also marked the beginning of a period of uncertainty. The end of the Cold War made the world more complicated, less stable, and more volatile than anyone had anticipated. Withdrawal of Soviet power from Eastern Europe and Africa created vacuums leading to conflicts that the United States did not wish to address but could not avoid. The narrow definition of national defense strategy in place for two decades left many soldiers unprepared for the challenge of the "new world disorder."

For much of the 1990s, the American armed forces were a military in search of a mission. Two contradictory scenarios confronted planners. Some favored continuation of the conventional emphasis. They feared a resurgent Russian Federation and/or China, either of which might within a decade or so outmatch the United States if it neglected to develop and deploy new weapons systems and maintain its force posture. Others believed the future belonged to lighter, more flexible, and rapidly deployable units that could deal with the wide range of scenarios present in the post–Cold War world. The American people for their part expected a "peace dividend" that would come from base closures and troop reductions. The Army active service component numbered 772,000 in 1989 and projected cuts would reduce it to 529,000 by 1994.[76] Faced with the choice between pursuing its traditional approach or restructuring, the military arguably did neither, maintaining its Cold-War force structure, albeit with reduced strength to face a nonexistent enemy while doing little to adapt to the new security environment.[77] One astute analyst described the United States during this era as a "reluctant superpower," bereft of its traditional mission yet unwilling to become embroiled in the pressing crises of the day.[78]

However, the post–Cold War world confronted the United States with challenges it could not avoid, no matter how much it might have wished to do so. The end of the Cold War broke the deadlock in the UN Security Council and made it possible for American forces to deploy on UN Peace missions. The collapse of states and the necessity for humanitarian intervention that they created provided ample opportunity for such interventions. Horrified by the famine in war-torn Somalia, the first Bush administration deployed U.S. Marines to the country in late 1992, just before the president left office. The Marines did an excellent job of safeguarding humanitarian aid delivery but refused to become embroiled in the ongoing civil war. The United States handed the mission back to the United Nations in the Spring of 2003 but kept American troops in the country. The new administration of William J. Clinton allowed American troops to hunt Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidide. This decision led to the disastrous episode recounted in the book and movie, *Blackhawk Down*. The sight of American bodies dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by cheering crowds broadcast around the world produced widespread anger in the United States and questions about why American soldiers were dying in a conflict that had nothing to do with vital American interests. President Clinton promptly withdrew American Forces by the end of 1993. The specter of Vietnam had not quite been put to rest.

The experience of Somalia made the United States hesitant to intervene in the Bosnian war (1992–95). Only after the conflict had raged for three bloody years did the Clinton administration agree to end it by force and then only with air action. The Untied States contributed the largest contingent to the International Force sent in to occupy Bosnia following the Dayton Peace Accords. The administration kept the force on a very short leash, restricting its activities, providing robust rules of engagement, and ensconcing American units within fortified camps that separated Americans from the local population. The administration was so averse to casualties that many observers quipped that force protection was *the* mission rather than a means to achieving it.

The U.S. intervention in Kosovo followed much the same pattern as Bosnia. Alarmed over Serbian atrocities against the province's ethnic Albanian majority, President Clinton threatened military intervention through NATO. Convinced that the alliance could not sustain the will for a military campaign against Serbia, President Slobodan Milošević called Washington's bluff. NATO reluctantly voted for the mission but wished to avoid a clash of ground forces. Clinton agreed and announced that the war would be waged solely from the air, an ill-advised public statement that allowed Serbian forces to disperse to avoid destruction. The 78-day bombing campaign might very well have failed had not the

members determined that NATO's survival as a viable alliance depended on victory in the Balkans.[79] Following Serbian withdrawal, NATO deployed a 40,000 strong Kosovo Force (KFOR) to which the U.S. contributed a significant troop contingent. As in Bosnia, American soldiers preferred to stay behind the wire of fortified camps, sallying forth in armed Humvees wearing Kevlar "battle rattle" (helmet and flak jacket) that put great distance between themselves and the local population.

KFOR did, however, provide invaluable experience for those officers who learned its lessons. "Kosovo put me in good stead to start a non-lethal targeting process," one combat arms officer said in reference to lessons he later applied in Iraq. "We quickly focused on getting supplies to hospitals, protecting them, and getting schools reopened, subsequent to that, standing up local governmental councils." The Reserve Civil Affairs (CA) battalions in particular learned a great deal about winning hearts and minds. Unfortunately, too few American soldiers rotated through Kosovo for the mission to have had much impact on the Army as a whole. Many of those who did seldom left Camp Bondsteel, the U.S. contingent fire-support base south of Gnjilane.

## TRANSFORMATION

The Balkan missions also revealed a significant structural weakness in U.S. forces that had to be addressed. Conventional division organization proved ill suited to internal security operations. Subunits of these large formations could not be disaggregated and deployed without rendering the remainder of the unit largely inoperable. If the military needed to send a brigade from the First Division in Germany to Bosnia, it had to take so much of the logistics, headquarters, and other support contingents along that the rest of the division could not function as an effective fighting force. The complex security threats of the post–Cold War world required a more flexible force structure.

To achieve this flexibility, the Pentagon aimed to reorganize the Army's ten divisions into smaller Maneuver Brigade Combat Team Units of Action (BCT [UA]) of 3,000–5,000 soldiers each. The *Army's Roadmap for Transformation* laid out a six-year plan for transforming all active, reserve, and National Guard forces to the BCT (UA) structure by 2010.[80] There would be three types of BCT (UA)s: heavy (armored and mechanized forces), Stryker (built around the Army's new, highly versatile light armored vehicle, the Stryker), and infantry. Each division would have four BCT (UA)s, at least one aviation brigade, and support brigades. Each BCT (UA) can be rapidly deployed, and BCT (UA)s can be mixed and matched as mission requirements dictate.

The Marines have adopted a slightly different approach to transformation based on "distributed operation." In distributed operations, "small, highly capable units spread across a large area of operations will provide the spatial advantage commonly sought in maneuver warfare." This approach allows units to disaggregate over a much wider area as COIN often requires. They can also rapidly reaggregate for more conventional operations. Given the Corps' history as an expeditionary force and its much smaller size, transformation should prove easier than it will for the army.

In the long run, transformation of U.S. ground forces should make them much more effective in unconventional operations. Unfortunately, transformation had not progressed very far when 9/11 changed the world. The United States would invade Iraq with essentially the same army that had fought the Gulf War and do transformation on the fly. This approach, dictated by necessity, meant that the military could adjust its transformation plans based on real combat experience. It would also be struggling to change profoundly entrenched institutional culture in the midst of a very difficult war.

## AFGHANISTAN

One final bit of experience would impact the way the U.S. military went to war in 2003. The undeniable link between Afghanistan's Taliban Regime and al-Qaeda made the invasion of the central Asian nation the first priority in the war on terrorism. The White House asked the Pentagon for its contingency plan for invading Afghanistan only to learn that none existed. The Defense Department improvised what will probably stand as one of the most amazing combinations of low and hi-tech assets in the history of warfare. An alliance of northern Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara tribes had opposed the Taliban for years but could make little headway against the government's more numerous and better armed forces. Three hundred Green Berets deployed in 18 12-man "A-teams" supported by four company-strength B-teams, and three battalion command C-teams changed the balance of power overnight. Equipped with laptop computers, the A-teams directed precision-guided munitions onto Taliban tanks, bases, and even small units. The awesome firepower of cruise missiles, carrier-based attack aircraft, and AC-130 Specter gun ships flying 6,500 strike missions delivering 17,500 munitions enabled 10,000 Northern Alliance fighters operating on horseback to rout the Taliban in weeks.[81] American forces delivered the munitions with such precision that in one attack Northern Alliance cavalry timed their charge to strike a Taliban formation immediately after the bombs hit with devastating effect.[82] Another 5,000 U.S. Rangers and other units operating out

of Uzbekistan secured air bases and other facilities. All told, some 5,500 U.S. soldiers suffering fewer than 300 fatalities (only half from combat) accomplished in a few months what 100,000 Soviet troops could not do in almost a decade despite losing 15,000 men.[83]

Afghanistan provides an excellent example of how much small numbers of Special Forces supporting indigenous fighters with precision guided weapons can accomplish. Impressive as the victory certainly was, it could be highly misleading. Most battles took place in open country, reducing the risk of civilian casualties. Fighting did not end with the rout of the Taliban. A large international force continues to engage Taliban and al-Qaeda units in difficult COIN operations that will last for years. Afghanistan has few large population centers, so the international force and the fledgling Afghan army have generally been spared the rigors of urban guerrilla warfare. None of these mitigating circumstances deterred Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld from concluding that if Afghanistan could be conquered on the cheap, so could Iraq. This assumption would profoundly shape planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom with disastrous consequences.

## THE U.S. MILITARY AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Just as the armed forces have been shaped by the wars they have fought, so too have they been conditioned by prevailing cultural values and social norms. Whether or not these characteristics shape military behavior to a greater or lesser degree than they do behavior in other American institutions or in the society as a whole, they exercise a powerful influence on those who fight. Each of these cultural and social factors must be considered when trying to understand the conduct of the Iraq War.

### A Metrics-Driven Society

"There are little white lies, damned lies, and statistics," declared Mark Twain to point out that numbers can be mustered to support almost any conclusion. The wizen sage no doubt realized that even in his day Americans saw counting things as the best measure of success. The last century has increased this penchant for measurement. Businesses, of course, need to count costs and calculate profits, but the metrics craze has crept into other institutions, often with pernicious effects. Assessment now drives education as the "No Child Left Behind" program mandates standardized testing as early as kindergarten. Even churches rely on weekly worship attendance as the main indicator of successful ministry. Small wonder the military places such emphasis on "measures of effectiveness" to assess operations.

While numbers do matter, problems arise when institutions apply metrics to things that cannot be easily measured. The results of good teaching in grade school may not be evident until college, but since metrics drive behavior, educators teach for the test to make sure that their class scores high, their school receives funding, and they get a raise. Whether such pedagogy best serves their students in the long run falls to second place in evaluating teachers.

Over-reliance on numbers in warfare has far more serious consequences. Soldiers trained to kill and encouraged to measure their effectiveness with body-count will focus on eliminating insurgents. Unintended civilian deaths will inevitably be high. Counting bodies also distracts the security forces from far more important but difficult to measure indicators of progress, such as civil development and other hearts-and-minds projects.

### A Low-Context Culture

The United States has what anthropologists describe as a "low-context culture."[23] Americans value directness, prefer to "cut the small talk" and "get to the point." Believing that "time is money," they have little patience for relationship building and often treat hospitality as an inconvenience. Unfortunately, most of the world does not interact in this manner. Many cultures require relationship building as a prerequisite to any business or political interaction. Refusing the offer of a drink or a cup of coffee causes offense and shuts down communication. Like large support bases and fortified encampments, American briskness puts distance between soldiers and the people whose trust they wish to gain.

People from a low-context culture trying to interact with those from a high-context one can easily grow frustrated and impatient, especially if interaction occurs in the context of a war. Americans are notoriously impatient, demanding that their needs be met and their interests looked after immediately. They often choose confrontation as a first response in the face of even minor provocation. This characteristic helps explain the tendency of soldiers to return a volume of fire out of proportion to that directed at them.

### Living at Home While Abroad

Americans are hermit crabs. Although they cannot exactly carry their homes on their backs, they insist on living overseas in an environment that approximates, as far as possible, living conditions here in the States. Five-star hotels around the world accommodate Americans by accepting their dollars, cooking food they like, providing the health clubs they

enjoy, and offering the television programs they watch at home. The hotel staff speaks English as do most locals involved in the tourist trade. This accommodation makes it easier for Americans to travel in comfort, but it also separates them from the people whose country they visit. Americans can travel around the world, seeing a lot of sites but learning very little about culture and day-to-day life.

It should come as no surprise that the U.S. military takes the same approach to travel as the rest of us. American soldiers stationed abroad tend to live in enclaves that reduce their need to interact with the locals or learn their language. Even when deployed to a combat zone, soldiers often build fortified bases with as many amenities of home as possible. The Green Zone in Baghdad, affectionately dubbed "Oz" to signify its detachment from the day to day reality of Iraq, is only the most recent manifestation of such self-contained communities. Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo contains everything from a health club to a Burger King, all safely inside the wire.

Soldiers in Iraq have, of course, made great sacrifices, living for much of the first year in difficult conditions without hot food, showers, or air conditioning for weeks on end. Like anyone else, they deserve to enjoy their off hours in relative comfort and security. However, as violence in Iraq worsened and the military shifted to a long-term occupation, the habit of withdrawing to secure bases reasserted itself. This tendency made interacting with Iraqis more difficult. Fortunately, the increase in troops provided by the Surge has allowed more soldiers and Marines to get back to living among the Iraqi people they are trying to protect.

### Black and White Values

Reducing cross-cultural communication to a simple transaction mirrors an equally problematic tendency to view even complex issues in black and white terms. Americans saw the Cold War as a Manichean struggle between good and evil. This simplistic conception often prevented American leaders from exploiting differences within a far from monolithic communist bloc. Based on this worldview, the Reagan administration concluded that Nicaragua would inevitably become a puppet of the Kremlin if the Sandinistas stayed in power. Many American politicians treat terrorism as the new boogieman that has replaced communism. President Bush expressed this simplistic view with his famous "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" remark shortly after 9/11.

Iraq has profoundly shaken this black-and-white worldview as soldiers and diplomats have come to realize that toppling Saddam would not lead automatically to western democracy.

### An Infatuation with Technology

"Build a better mouse trap, and the world will beat a path to your door," an old American adage has it. This folk wisdom attests to a love of gadgets. Computers become obsolete before they leave the store, flat screen TVs edge out traditional sets, and the latest game systems fly off the shelves. Technology has truly transformed all areas of life, including warfare. In the military the penchant for gadgets sometimes becomes an obsession, an unshakable faith that a piece of equipment exists to solve every problem. Faith in technology explains the neglect of human intelligence that left the United States vulnerable to terrorism. It also helps explain why soldiers taken out of tanks and armored personnel carriers often have great difficulty functioning like regular infantry.

### Meritocracy and Micromanagement

The United States does not have a class system in the traditional European sense of the term. The ability of ordinary people to become enormously successful and wealthy has created a powerful "egalitarian" belief (some might say "myth"). The presumption that everyone is born equal makes it hard for Americans to acknowledge that the accidents of birth convey advantages or impose limitations. Those who rise to the top often believe they have done so purely through merit and hard work. Success, they believe, means that they know more about all the jobs they have done than those currently holding them. This notion encourages a strong American tendency to micromanage subordinates. Historically, this tendency has been especially pronounced in the U.S. military. Foreign officers working with Americans frequently comment that commanders not only give their subordinates orders but often explain how to carry them out. This management style runs counter to the vital need to decentralize command and control for COIN operations.

## GOING TO WAR WITH THE ARMY THAT YOU HAVE

The U.S. invaded Iraq with armed forces refashioned in the aftermath of Vietnam. The Army in particular had been given a straightforward but nonetheless difficult primary mission: deter and if necessary stop a massive Soviet attack through the Fulda Gap in Germany. The insurmountable disparity in numbers between NATO and the Warsaw Pact forced the United States to compensate for mass with technology. Firepower would make up for the troop deficit. Beside the daunting task of defending Europe, the Army understandably considered all other missions as at best secondary and at worst a distraction from its core task. It could and would defend the Korean peninsula, a challenge very similar

to its central European role, but unconventional war must be relegated to Special Forces.

The United States thus got the army that it wanted and paid for, a high-tech conventional force built around heavy armored formations reinforced by air power and backed by a strategic threat up to and including nuclear weapons. For 20 years that Army served it well. The much-feared attack in Germany never came, deterred in large measure by the awesome array of American firepower. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, the United States unleashed its fearsome war machine only once. The 1991 Gulf War revealed that America possessed an unrivaled conventional force.

However, the very characteristics that made the U.S. military such an effective conventional war machine limited its ability to fight unconventional war. Its size and complexity made it a cumbersome tool whose components could not be easily detached for smaller missions. The intensive training necessary to handle complex weapons systems left little time or inclination for training in COIN. The challenge of handling large formations on a complex battlefield upon which more than 120 killing systems could be brought to bear necessitated fairly inflexible top-down command and control structures reinforced by the American penchant for micromanagement.

The conventional army also produced conventional soldiers, particularly general officers. Promoted for their ability to handle ever-larger formations in combined operations, they would prove to be a conservative lot. The *Army Roadmap for Transformation* clearly identifies this weakness: "Decades of planning and preparation against set-piece enemies predisposed American Soldiers to seek certainty and synchronization in the application of force."[84] Faced with an unconventional threat, most of these soldiers would rely on firepower and few would understand the nature of COIN. Like the army that they commanded, however, they too were what the nation had demanded. They would exceed all expectations in the drive to Baghdad and yet prove initially incapable of effectively combatting the insurgency that followed the collapse of the Iraqi armed forces. They would of course learn, but the learning would be costly in blood and treasure.

# CHAPTER 3

# IRAQ IN CONTEXT

## THE CHALLENGE

History, culture, and society had created the American military that went to war in March 2003. These powerful forces had also shaped the country that they invaded. Modern Iraq did not develop as a viable state over a long period of time. The great powers created it after the First World War. Iraq spent its first half century of life searching for a stable government. Stability finally came in the person of a brutal dictator who squandered the nation's resources on disastrous wars and personal luxury and deepened its internal divisions with his divide-and-conqueror policies. The United States exacerbated the country's problems, first supporting the dictatorship and then seeking its overthrow in a manner that inflicted suffering on the Iraqi people. Their resentment complicates the American occupation today.

## COLONIAL LEGACY

The victorious allies created the modern Middle East out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. In redrawing the map, they had to reconcile conflicting promises made to various parties with their own self-interest. In doing so they paid little attention to the wishes of indigenous people. This colonial legacy created enormous problems that remain unresolved to the present.

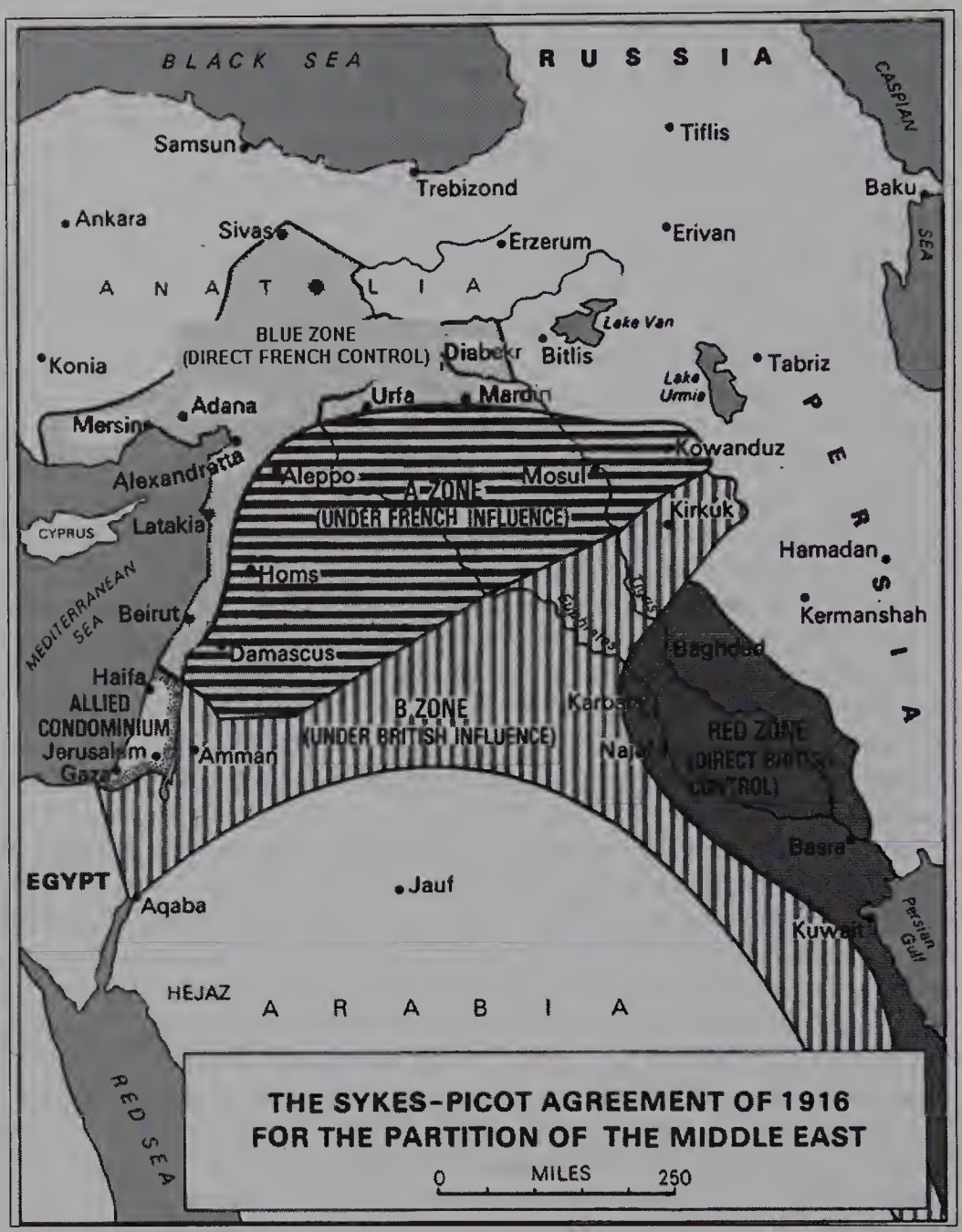
From 1914 to 1916, the chances of an allied victory seemed far from certain. In addition to holding the Western Front, Britain had to garrison Egypt, support an ill-advised expeditionary force to Mesopotamia, and recover from the failed Gallipoli landings. To recoup the situation London cast about for allies, making vague promises that it might later qualify or even revoke. Thanks to the efforts of eccentric intelligence officer and Middle East scholar T. E. Lawrence, they persuaded the Sharif of Mecca,

Hussein bin Ali, to revolt against his Turkish overlords. As reward for his services, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, promised that Hussein's two sons would receive territory carved out of the Ottoman Empire. Abdullah would get one emirate centered on Jerusalem and his son Faisal another built around Damascus. At the same time that they were making promises to the Arabs, however, the British were also pledging support for "a national homeland for the Jewish People in Palestine." Meanwhile, they and their French allies secretly agreed to divide the spoils of the conquered territories between them.[1]

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 divided Ottoman territory into four zones. The British would exercise direct control of Mesopotamia from Baghdad to Basra and Kuwait while the French ruled the Levant coast from roughly the current border of Israel to the port of Alexandretta. They would also control the Kurdish region of Turkey and its southeastern Mediterranean coast. Both countries would also be awarded "zones of influence" with the understanding that they would exercise protectorate authority over Arab states created within these zones. The British zone of influence stretched from the Sinai Desert northeast to Kirkuk and southeast to the Persian Gulf. The French zone of influence incorporated the interior of contemporary Syria and northern Iraq, including the city of Mosul. The Agreement designated Palestine an "allied condominium" whose precise international governance would be decided later (see Map 3.1).[2]

Treaty negotiations between the British, French, and Turks after the war significantly altered the Sykes-Picot Agreement. France relinquished claims to Turkish territory. Mustafa Kemal (known as "Ataturk"—father Turk), the new leader of a secularized Turkey reversed by force of arms allied promises of an expanded Armenia and Greek claims to the Ionian coast and thwarted a proposal to create an independent Kurdistan that would include Turkish territory. The newly created League of Nations granted the British Mandates (colonial control but with the promise of independence) over Palestine and Mesopotamia, renamed "Iraq," and gave France Mandates over Syria and Lebanon.

Britain had still to fulfill its promises to the Jews and the Arabs. The Mandate of Palestine honored the Balfour Declaration by explicitly empowering a Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to oversee immigration and the affairs of Jews in Palestine. To reward Hussein for his services during the Arab Revolt, Britain split the Palestinian Mandate and made his son Abdullah Emir of Transjordan, which later became the kingdom of Jordan as it remains to this day. The French initially accepted Hussein's other son Faisal as king in Damascus but turned him out when he proved a less than compliant puppet. After a brief exile, he became king of Iraq under British protection. In retrospect, it would be difficult to exaggerate the




**Map 3.1**

*Source:* Palestine Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs.

pernicious effects of these arrangements, but at the time they seemed reasonable enough.

The precise boundaries of Iraq became a source of bitter contention between France and Britain. Sykes-Picot had granted London direct control over the Tigris-Euphrates as far north as Kirkuk and included

Mosul and the Kurdish north in the French Zone of influence. Prime Minister David Lloyd George wanted Mosul, which he correctly surmised contained rich oil deposits. Premier Georges Clemenceau initially agreed, perhaps unaware of the value of the new strategic resource. "When I want some oil," he once remarked, "I'll find it at my grocers."[3] He threatened to rescind the offer of Mosul but ultimately acquiesced to British control in return for a share of future oil profits. Resolution of the Anglo-French dispute did not, however, resolve the status of Mosul. Ataturk asserted a Turkish claim to the region. Finally in 1925, a League of Nation commission decided that the Ottoman province of Mosul should remain part of Iraq, provided the British allowed the Kurds some degree of local administrative autonomy. A tripartite treaty signed by Britain, Iraq, and Turkey the following year confirmed the arrangement.

The Mandate that became the modern state of Iraq (see Map 3.2) encompassed most of three Ottoman *vilayets* (administrative districts): Mosul in the North, Baghdad in the center, and Basra in the south. Britain separated Kuwait from the rest of Basra vilayet and adjusted the northern border of Mosul. The new state covered 168,727 square miles within 2,268 miles of border.[4] Vast stretches of arid land confined most of the population to the Tigris-Euphrates valley, from whence the country drew its name; *al-'Iraq* in Arabic means "shore of a great river along its length."[5] Iraq's boundaries made geopolitical sense but showed little regard for ethnic groupings. At the time of the Mandate, Iraq had a population of approximately 3 million of whom 80 percent were Arab and 20 percent Kurd. Religion divided the Arabs into Shi'as (80 percent) and Sunnis (20 percent). The Kurds practiced Sunni Islam but had little else in common with Sunni Arabs. Iraq also had sizable Jewish and Christian communities accounting for 8 percent of the population.[6]

Having created the new state, the British quickly found it to be ungovernable. As British plans for Iraq took shape, resentment against colonial rule deepened and, in June 1920, led to open revolt. Some groups believed that the new arrangement would undermine their privileged position under the Turks, while others saw an opportunity to gain power, influence, and wealth. The extent of the unrest made the revolt bloody; lack of coordination made it short-lived and unsuccessful. The revolt had, however, taken the lives of 6,000 Iraqis and 500 British and demonstrated that the cost of direct rule would be unacceptably high.[7]

Britain had to devise a means of indirect rule that would promote stability and safeguard British interests at a reasonable cost. Any solution to Iraq must also be part of a comprehensive plan for the Middle East, a particularly volatile region at the time. To address the problem of Iraq, the Secretary for War and Air, Sir Winston Churchill, convened a conference of military officers and Colonial and Foreign Office representatives in

**Map 3.2**

*Source:* University of Texas, Perry Castañeda Map Collection, 2004.

Cairo, Egypt, in March 1921. Concern for the cost of the Iraqi revolt and the even more expensive prospect of continuing to garrison the country led Churchill to back a plan to turn Iraq into a kingdom ruled by Faisal, third son of Hussein, Sharif of Mecca. Having learned his lesson in Syria, Faisal accepted his dependence on Britain. Besides addressing the Iraqi situation, the new arrangement tied up a loose end from the Great War, McMahon's promise to find a kingdom for Hussein's son, and to appease

the rising tide of pan-Arab nationalism.[8] A member of the Prophet Mohammed's family, a leader of the Arab Revolt during the First World War, and a British ally, the Hashemite prince seemed the ideal candidate to govern Iraq.[9]

The choice of a Sunni prince to rule had profound implications for how Iraq would be governed. Faisal would undoubtedly appoint Sunni Iraqi Arabs to key positions. He may have had little choice. The Turks had used the time-honored imperial practice of ruling through a minority who would be dependent upon their colonial masters. As a result, most trained army officers and civil servants came from the Sunni Arab community. Faisal and his British handlers perpetuated this situation, encouraging Sunni minority dominance that would last through the regime of Saddam Hussein. They created a constitutional monarchy based on a restricted and rather convoluted franchise and gave the king extraordinary executive powers that guaranteed that the legislature could not pass a law without his approval. Faisal and his successors managed tribal sheiks by skillfully granting them legal title to land and dolling out patronage.[10]

## SEARCHING FOR STABILITY

In 1932, Iraq joined the League of Nations, fulfilling the terms of the Mandate. Britain had successfully created a state but not a nation. States form when a central government exercises meaningful sovereignty over territory within internationally recognized boundaries. Nations arise when the citizens or subjects of a state identify themselves proudly as its members, sharing a common language and culture. Far from being natural entities, nations must be created.[11] In Europe, modern states began to appear in the seventeenth century, slowly developing into nations over the next 250 years. Free, compulsory public education replaced local dialects with a national language and taught a romanticized version of history. Participation in national institutions like the army furthered this sense of belonging as roads and railroads connected even remote villages to the cities.[12]

Iraq had no time for the process of nation-building to evolve. Faisal and his successors perpetuated Sunni domination. The British reoccupied the country during World War II to forestall the possibility of an Iraqi-German alliance. The monarchy fell in 1958, and a series of Sunni strongmen ruled the country following a succession of coups. The Kurds never felt part of the state and the Shi'a resented being ruled by the Sunni Arab minority. In this environment it remains unclear whether a strong Iraqi identity ever spread beyond a small educated elite. Even among this elite two identities competed with one another.

During the First World War, pan-Arabism emerged to challenge Ottoman rule. Hussein bin Ali led an Arab Revolt and hoped to receive a kingdom for his sons in return. Adherents called this nationalism *qawmiyah*, an Arabic term that once had Muslim religious connotations but had since come to mean folk or ethnic nationalism. Against this broad ideal stood the narrower definition of nationalism, *wataniyah* in Arabic, loyalty to a particular nation state within set boundaries. These two ideals would continue to compete throughout modern Iraq's brief but turbulent history.[13] Iraqi leaders understood that they could exercise real power only within the confines of Iraq, but they made use of Arab nationalism as it suited them to gain support from their domestic Sunni power base and other Arab states. Since *qawmiyah* excluded the majority of Iraqis, cultivating this ideal inhibited formation of a multi-ethnic Iraqi identity.

Religion played no major role in either conception of nationalism. Pan-Arabism reached its height in the 1950s under Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, a secular leader who believed the western concept of modernity offered the Arab world its best chance for unity and progress. The Shi'a-Sunni divide within Iraq itself precluded a religious-based nationalism. However, if Islam could not serve as a unifying force within the country, Islamic institutions could become centers of opposition to a regime that discriminated against the Shi'a majority. The power of the Shi'a clerics known as "Ayatollahs" encouraged this tendency. Under the thumb of strong central government, the clerics could be confined to their mosques. If that control disappeared, as it did in 2003, their *fatwas* (religious edicts) would spill over into the streets.

The Hashemite monarchy of Iraq ended on the night of July 13–14, 1958. A group within the Army known as the Free Officers led by General 'Abdl al-Karim Qasim overthrew the government in a rapid coup. They and much of the political nation, small though it was, had grown weary of a regime that had been the tool first of the British and then the Americans. These Sunni officers drew inspiration from Egypt's Nasser, who seized power in a 1952 coup, nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, and formed the United Arab Republic (UAR) with Syria in 1958. However, King Faisal II and his Prime Minister Nuri Said saw alliance with the west as offering the best future for Iraq (and continued power for themselves). Iraq joined the Baghdad Pact, an alliance that included Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. The United States encouraged the alliance and supplied its members with weapons. The Pact provided further evidence that the monarchy served the west, not Iraq. Nuri's creation of the Arab Union with Jordan to offset the UAR sealed the regime's fate. Troops that he had ordered to the Jordanian border had to pass through Baghdad, where they seized the royal palace, killed the king and his family, and gunned Nuri Said down in the street.

However idealistic the Free Officers may have been at the outset, they quickly became brutally pragmatic about consolidating power within Iraq. To broaden the appeal of their revolution, they invited the three main political powers (the National Democratic Party, the Iraqi Communist Party, and the Ba'ath Party) and others to stage popular rallies in support of change.[14] The demonstrations soon made Iraq's new rulers uneasy, so they declared martial law and clamped down on dissent. When former prime minister and pan-Arabist Rashid Ali contacted like-minded Free Officers disillusioned by Qasim's abandonment of their cause, the General had him executed. Qasim became a virtual dictator until another coup overthrew him in 1963.

Pan-Arabism played as significant a role in the overthrow of Qasim as it had in the removal of the monarchy. The Free Officer who had invited him to lead the 1958 coup, Colonel Abudus-Salam 'Arif, had never forgiven Qasim for turning his back on the rest of the Arab world. He conspired with like-minded officers and the Ba'ath party to remove the general from power. On February 9, 1963, almost five years to the day after the overthrow of Faisal II, rebel forces captured Qasim after a day of hard fighting in Baghdad. The conspirators tried him and several of his followers before a drumhead tribunal and executed them. Qasim's flirtation with the communists to offset the Ba'athists has encouraged considerable speculation that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had backed and perhaps directly aided the conspirators.[15]

The 1963 coup did not, however, bring the Ba'athists to power or stability to Iraq. Itself internally divided, the party had made common cause with pan-Arab (but non-Ba'athist) officers like 'Arif to overthrow Qasim. The army had armed the Ba'ath National Guard during the coup, making it a potential threat to the regime should unity break down. When the Ba'ath prime minister not only allied with Syria and Egypt but embraced Marxism as well, 'Arif had had enough. He cracked down on the Ba'ath Party and consolidated power in his own hands as president and commander and chief. To maintain control of Iraq, 'Arif created the Republican Guards and revived the monarchy's practice of doling out patronage along tribal and clan lines to maintain control of the Guard and the Army and to manage the country as whole.[16] Combined with skillful use of Iraq's rising oil revenues, this approach might have kept 'Arif in power for a long time to come. Unfortunately, a helicopter crash ended his rule in 1966.

'Arif had developed such a strong patronage system based on kinship ties that his brother 'Abdal al-Rahman 'Arif easily stepped into his shoes. He proved unable to fill them. Failure to nurture his brother's patrimony, continuing tension between pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism, a desultory war in the Kurdish north, anger over foreign control of Iraqi oil,

and fear over defense budget cuts again led disgruntled officers to seek al-Rahman's ouster. They accomplished this in cooperation with the Ba'ath Party that the 'Arif brothers had thought moribund. In a virtually bloodless coup revolutionary army units seized key buildings in Baghdad. 'Arif wisely went into voluntary exile. A new President, General Hasan al-Bakr, now led Iraq assisted by his kinsman, a little known Ba'ath Party leader Saddam Hussein, who would rule Iraq until his overthrow in 2003.

## RISE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

Saddam Hussein Abd al-Majid al-Tikriti was born to a modest family in a small village outside the town of Tikrit, north of Baghdad, in 1937. He had some formal education but succeeded through a combination of ability, kinship ties, and sheer ruthlessness. He first appeared on the political stage in 1959 when he joined a group of disillusioned Ba'athists in an attempt on Qasim's life. He became party secretary in 1963, a position that landed him in prison in 1964, when 'Arif cracked down on the Ba'athists. He escaped in 1967, just in time to participate in the coup the following year. Al-Bakr made him his deputy and deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. Over the next decade he gradually extended his control of Iraq until he seized power in his own right in 1979 by ushering al-Bakr into retirement.

Saddam's approach to securing, maintaining, and wielding power bears a striking resemblance to that of Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. A tough but pragmatic bureaucratic infighter, Saddam eschewed ideological debate and concentrated on gaining control of the Ba'ath party machinery. His position as party secretary allowed him to dole out patronage and appoint people personally loyal to him. He and al-Bakr believed that the Ba'ath Party should be a disciplined cadre of supporters who would aid the regime not debate ideas.[17] Unlike many of his predecessors, Saddam understood that controlling the armed forces would not in itself keep any regime in power. The street increasingly mattered, and Saddam had risen within the party through his ability to control it. Possessed of a prodigious memory, he took an interest in civil service appointments almost down to the lowliest clerk.[18] He knew that most Iraqis would accept a regime that improved their quality of life even if it gave them little voice in politics, which they had never had anyway. Increasing oil revenues made possible by new exploration and nationalization of the foreign-controlled Iraqi Oil Company in 1972 helped him deliver bread and butter.

Like any successful dictator, Saddam knew how to wield the stick as he dangled the carrot. He created an elaborate spy network and an awesome machinery of state terror. Like Stalin, he understood the value of the

trumped-up conspiracy and the show trial. He used both with consummate skill to purge the party of potential rivals and noncompliant members. He also went after any sources of opposition, real or potential, within Iraqi society. Powerful Shi'a clerics had long been a concern for Iraq's Sunni rulers, but this concern increased dramatically with the success of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution in Iran in February 1979. Saddam went after the secret al-Da'wa organization led by Iraqi Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. When the arrest led to widespread street protests, Saddam responded with force, arresting some 5,000 people, including many Shi'a and Sunni clerics.[19] In 1980, he had al-Sadr tortured and executed.

## THE UNITED STATES AND IRAQ: A TALE OF TWO POLICIES

The United States had long taken an interest in Iraq as part of its broader Middle East policy based on clear, if at times conflicting, strategic goals in the region. Access to, if not control of, oil has always been paramount. During the Cold War, the United States also sought to counter Soviet influence and the spread of communism in the region. To this end, it had encouraged creation of the Baghdad Pact in 1958 and perhaps supported the 1959 assassination attempt against Qasim and his 1963 overthrow. Increasing support for Israel beginning in 1967 complicated U.S. relations with Arab states.

While the United States desired better relations with Iraq, it had no need to court the Iraqi regime during the 1960s or 1970s. America relied on its ally and regional strong man Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, to support its interests and offset Iraq in the Persian Gulf. The situation changed dramatically in February 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution overthrew the Shah. Any hope of rapprochement with the new regime disappeared when dissidents stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and seized 63 American hostages, holding 52 of them for 444 days. Initially, Saddam Hussein did Washington's dirty work without being asked. Seeing an opportunity in perceived Iranian weakness and concerned about the spread of Islamic radicalism, he went to war with Iran in September 1980. Saddam had substantial wealth and well-supplied, Soviet-equipped armed forces to deploy against an Iranian military purged of its American-trained officers and denied spare parts to maintain its American equipment.[20]

Soon after the outbreak of war, the new administration of President Ronald Reagan moved toward closer relations with Iraq. On April 4, 1981, the U.S. Interest Section in Baghdad sent the State Department its assessment of the situation in the country in preparation for the visit of Deputy Secretary of State Morris Draper. "The atmosphere here is

excellent following our decision not to sell arms to Iran, the increased Iraqi commerce and contacts with the U.S., mutual upgrading of diplomatic staffs and, most recently, the go ahead on five Boeing Aircraft for Iraq," the memo concluded. "We now have a greater convergence of interests with Iraq than at any time since the revolution of 1958."[21] A flurry of diplomatic correspondence between Washington and Baghdad followed Draper's visit and paved the way for closer contact between the two nations. In February 1982, the United States removed Iraq from the list of states supporting terrorism. Washington may even have been providing covert assistance to Iraq as indicated by an ambiguous statement in an account of the meeting between U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tarik Aziz in May 1982. Schultz told Aziz that although the United States had been neutral in not selling arms to either side during the war, "we had been helpful to Iraq in various ways."[22]

As the tide of war turned against Iraq, the United States became increasingly concerned. The Reagan administration moved to normalize relations and lift the arms embargo. In preparation for a visit by Reagan's special envoy to the Middle East Donald Rumsfeld in December 1983, the U.S. Interests Section prepared a list of talking points for the meeting. "The US G[overnment] recognizes Iraq's disadvantage in a war of attrition since Iran has access to the [Persian] Gulf while Iraq does not," the memo observed, "and would regard any reversal of Iraq's fortunes as a strategic defeat for the West."[23] Rumsfeld's visit went well and a second ensued. The United States reestablished diplomatic relations with Iraq in 1984, pressured its friends and allies to end arms sales to Iran, and supplied Iraq with weapons and other war materials, directly and through third parties.

To offset Iran's numerical advantage in what had degenerated into a war of attrition, Iraq turned to chemical weapons. Concerned about mounting domestic media criticism, the United States condemned use of such weapons while making clear that it would not make their discontinuation a condition of further aid. In a March 1984 cable to the U.S. Interest Section in Baghdad, Secretary of State George Schultz issued rather ambiguous guidance on the matter. The memo called for "reiterating our urgent request that Iraq not make use of chemical weapons." It insisted that we were also "adamantly opposed" to Iraq getting materials, equipment, or expertise from the United States and would stop shipment of any such materials known to be for use in the manufacture of chemical weapons.[24] However, since most weapons contained chemicals that not only had legitimate peaceful uses but also were supplied by private companies, the Reagan administration had plenty of wiggle room. A follow-up telegram to the U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad and other

American embassies in the region maintained that Iraq's use of "nerve gas and/or other forms of chemical warfare" would not endanger relations with Saddam Hussein. The Secretary of State assured everyone that we were still "interested in being involved in a closer dialogue with Baghdad."[25]

Throughout the remainder of the Reagan years, Iraq got the weapons necessary to turn the tide against Iran. Saddam definitely received conventional arms and U.S. loan credits to buy them. The administration certainly knew of and allowed Iraq to manufacture chemical weapons. Considerable circumstantial evidence suggests that it may have covertly assisted Iraq in this endeavor. The United States also provided the Iraqi military valuable intelligence on Iranian deployments and troop movements. During the same period, Saddam's scientists acquired from private firms anthrax and materials for their nuclear weapons program, though it seems highly unlikely that the United States would have supported this effort. U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf may also have aided the Iraqis. Under the guise of protecting tankers, the United States effectively destroyed the Iranian navy.[26]

The most damning evidence on U.S. support for Saddam Hussein came out in the mid-1990s during prosecutions of U.S. companies for selling dual-use chemicals (which could be employed for peaceful purposes as well as for weapons) and/or nuclear material to Iraq. The accused defended themselves by asserting that the Reagan administration had made covert aid to Iraq its policy. In one such trial a former member of the Reagan National Security Council provided an affidavit stating that "in June 1982 President Reagan decided that he could not allow Iraq to lose the war to Iran." The President would do "whatever was necessary and legal" to prevent Iraqi defeat. The witness also testified that CIA Director William Casey had argued adamantly that Iraq should receive cluster bombs, the "perfect force multipliers" to counter Iranian human wave attacks.[27] An American company sold materials for making cluster bombs to a Chilean firm, which then sold them to Iraq.

If the United States acquiesced in Saddam's use of chemical weapons against Iranians, it turned an equally blind eye to his brutal treatment of the Iraqi Kurds. The Arab Sunni-dominated government had long struggled with the Kurds in the north, fighting a series of desultory wars with them throughout modern Iraq's short history. While the Sunni-dominated army could control cities and towns, it could make little headway against the Kurds' mountain strongholds. The central government had always been brutal enough in its dealings with the Kurds, but Saddam Hussein elevated brutality to genocide as a result of the war with Iran. Angered at Iranian instigation of Kurdish rebellion and determined to remove this threat to his rear, Saddam began his policy of *al-Anfal*

(the spoils), the Arabic name of the eighth *Sura* of the *Holy Quran*, interpreted as a license to plunder the goods of infidels defeated in battle. Conducted from 1980 to 1988, this systematic campaign aimed "to solve the Kurdish problem and slaughter the saboteurs," according to an Iraqi leader charged with carrying it out.[28] The Anfal involved the clearing and destruction of 2,000 villages and the murder of at least 50,000 Iraqi men, women, and children. The genocide also included the infamous use of a nerve-mustard gas mixture against the town of Halabja in which 3,500–5,000 people died.[29]

The Anfal also included a policy of "Arabization" under way since at least the 1970s. This policy involved the forced removal of Kurds and the settlement of Arabs in formerly Kurdish areas. The exact number of people displaced by this policy, driven out by the Anfal, or forced to flee from other oppressive measures may never be known. Human Rights Watch estimates that by 1991, 1 million of Iraqi Kurdistan's 3.5 million people had been displaced.[30]

Decades of persecution and intermittent warfare exacerbated by Saddam's genocide made one thing certain. Given any say in the matter, the Kurds would never agree to membership in an Iraqi state governed by Sunni Arabs. Nor would they welcome Shi'a governance. The vast majority would prefer independence and, only reluctantly, accept membership in a Federated Iraq, provided it gave them almost complete local autonomy. This reality seems to have escaped those who insisted American forces could hand power to a truly national government soon after taking Baghdad.

## THE GULF WAR AND ITS LEGACY

If anything like an Iraqi national identity had ever existed, Saddam's policy severely weakened it. The 1990–91 Gulf War would further undermine the fragile unity of the state. President George H.W. Bush's apparent call for the people of Iraq to remove their dictator led the Shi'a and the Kurds to rebel. When Saddam brutally crushed the Shi'a revolt, the United States did nothing. Only belatedly and because of international and domestic pressure did it protect the Kurds with a no-fly zone in the north. Damage to infrastructure caused by the war and the decade of sanctions that followed so adversely affected Iraq that life expectancy declined significantly. These events deeply embittered many Iraqis toward the United States and help to explain anti-American feeling that persists to this day.

Why Saddam believed he could get away with invading Kuwait in August 1990 remains unclear, but the disastrous consequences of his actions do not. He may have thought that the United States still needed

him to balance Iran in the Persian Gulf, or perhaps he believed it would not be worth the cost of reversing a *fait accompli*. An ambiguous statement by acting U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie about how the United States would view such an act of aggression also encouraged Saddam to invade. Accusing Kuwait of drilling laterally into Iraqi oil fields and reasserting a historic claim to what had once been part of the vilayet of Basra, Saddam sent his forces across the frontier on August 2. They encountered little resistance, seized the capital, Kuwait City, and quickly overran the country. Saddam also treated Kuwaitis with the same brutality he had unleashed on his own people.

The United States could not tolerate a rogue state dominating the Persian Gulf and upsetting the balance of power in the region. As the world's second largest oil producer, Iraq already had enormous influence on supply and prices. Control of the Kuwaiti oil fields would increase that power exponentially and threaten Saudi Arabia. The United Nations approved a military operation to liberate the country, the first international police action since the Korean Conflict. The United States assembled a coalition of 500,000 troops, including contingents from many Arab states. On January 17, 1991, the coalition began a massive air campaign against targets in Iraq and launched its ground assault on February 24. Four days later, Iraq capitulated. The ground war had lasted fewer than 100 hours and resulted in fewer than 100 U.S. deaths.

The war left Saddam weakened but still in power while doing irreparable harm to the Iraqi people. The 42-day air campaign destroyed or severely damaged Iraqi infrastructure. To its credit, the coalition did everything in its power to avoid unnecessary civilian casualties. Perhaps 2,500–3,000 Iraqi civilians died in air attacks, a sad but relatively small loss of life given the extent of the bombing and the fact that precision-guided munitions comprised only about 10 percent of the ordinance used.[31] Damage to the electric grid and water purification systems would have far more serious consequences in the ensuing years, leading to increasing infant mortality rates and death from diseases caused by impure drinking water.

Economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations and enforced by the United States exacerbated suffering caused by the war. Designed to pressure Saddam into complying with international monitoring and inspection of his weapons programs, the embargo on exports and imports failed to undermine the dictator but hurt the Iraqi people. Excluding the Kurdish north, infant mortality rates more than doubled from 47 per 1000 births (1985–89) to 108 per 1000 (1994–99) while child mortality (under age five) increased from 56 to 131 during the same period. Most children died of malnutrition or treatable diseases such as diarrhea and respiratory infections, which accounted for 70 percent of infant and child deaths. Sanctions inhibited rebuilding of critical infrastructure, including

electricity, water purification, and irrigation, all of which contributed to health and sanitation problems.[32] The "Oil for Food Program" (1995), under which Saddam could sell some oil for food and medicine, ameliorated, but did not remove, this suffering, especially since the dictator managed to divert much of the revenue to his own use.

The embargo not only had a deleterious effect on the Iraqis' quality of life but also adversely affected their attitudes toward the United States. Virtually all experts agree that sanctions do not hurt dictators. As much as they no-doubt hated Saddam, most Iraqis blamed the United States as the immediate cause of their suffering. This resentment compounded an already substantial legacy of bitterness. It should have surprised no one that this resentment would rapidly replace euphoria over the toppling of Saddam in 2003.

While damage to critical infrastructure and sanctions produced long-term misery, the suffering that befell the Shi'a and Kurds struck immediately. Both the UN Resolution authorizing use of force and the coalition strategy called for liberating Kuwait, not toppling Saddam Hussein. However, wartime rhetoric invariably escalates. Addressing a group of Raytheon workers on February 15, 1991, President George H.W. Bush said that one way to end the war was for "the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside and then comply with the UN resolutions and then rejoin the family of peace-loving nations."[33] In his memoir the President explained that he had impulsively added the statement after rejecting an Iraqi cease-fire offer. "I was anxious to see how that [the statement] played out," he admitted. "There was some risk, but perhaps the Iraqi people would respond." He denied, though, that he had added a new goal to the coalition agenda: toppling Saddam.[34]

Risk there certainly was, and respond the Iraqis unfortunately did. On March 2, the Shi'a in Basra rose against Saddam, expecting aid from Americans just outside the city. Instead U.S. soldiers stood by as Republican Guard units moved in to crush the revolt. "I watched as Iraqi helicopter gun ships flew into the city and gunned down everything in their way," one American officer observed. "I watched as troops were sent in and I can tell you, first hand, what was going on in Basrah [sic]." Stationed just three miles from the city, Patrick Lowe processed refugees fleeing the carnage:

> They pleaded with me to do something, anything to stop this wholesale mass murder. I heard stories of women and children being burned alive, in their homes. Women being raped to death, men being chopped up alive. Civilians being used for target practice, mass hangings.

Lowe begged his superiors for permission to intervene but was told to do nothing without explicit orders, which never came. "I have never

been more ashamed of our country's actions as I was at that point," he concluded.[35] Saddam slaughtered as many as 300,000 Shi'a, who would be wary of ever trusting the United States again.[36]

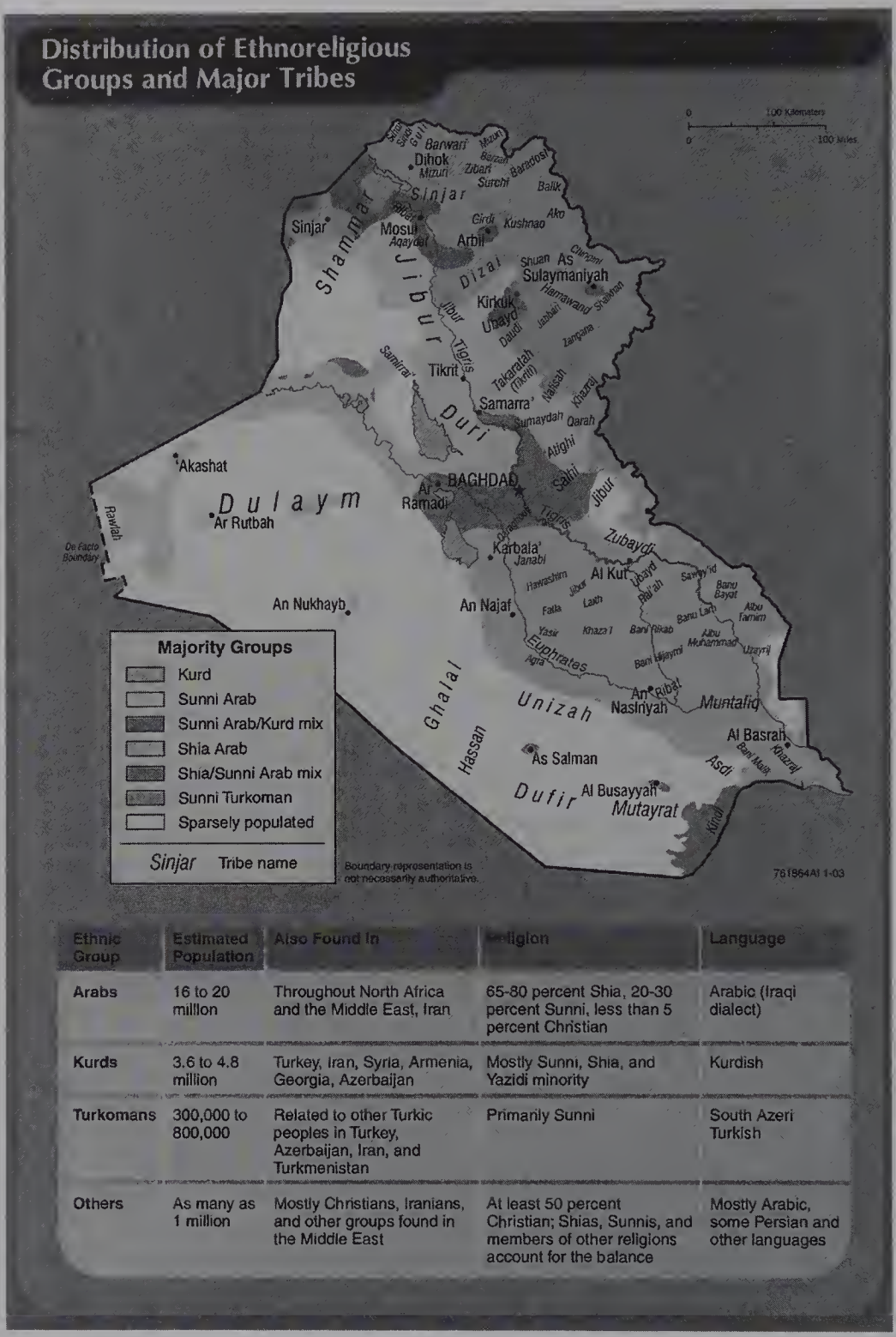
The Kurds suffered a similar fate. Their rising began March 6. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff member Peter Galbraith observed events in Iraq following the rebellion. The Kurdish leaders "had thought President Bush meant it when he called on the Iraqi people to overthrow Saddam Hussein."[37] The dictator's forces slaughtered thousands of Kurds and interred thousands more. As many as 2 million fled over the borders into Iran and Turkey, where thousands died of exposure. Embarrassed by the images of parents burying their children, the Bush administration declared no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq. In the north the coalition created a liberated area and launched a massive humanitarian relief effort, Operation Provide Comfort. At the end of the day, the Kurds drew much the same conclusion about trusting the United States as the Shi'a. They would never "voluntarily agree to be part of Iraq again."[38]

However morally reprehensible his failure to protect the Shi'a and Kurds may have been, the first President Bush offered sound strategic reasons for not marching on to Baghdad. "The coalition would instantly have collapsed, the Arabs deserting it in anger, and others pulling out as well," he observed. "Under those circumstances, there was no viable exit strategy we could see." Written in 1998, his remarks now ring with irony. They might as well have been written in 2003. His poignant conclusion could also be an epitaph for the current war: "Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land."[39] His son, the current President George W. Bush, appears either not to have read his father's book or to have disregarded its advice.

## IRAQ ON THE EVE OF THE AMERICAN INVASION

By the fall of 2002, Iraq had been through two decades of war, ethnic cleansing, state terror, and sanctions. Iraqi Kurdistan already enjoyed quasi-independence under the protection of the northern no-fly zone. The Shi'a south remained cowed by Saddam's fearsome security forces but by no means reconciled to Sunni Arab domination.

Since the state's creation in the 1920s, the population of Iraq has increased dramatically, but its ethnic balance has changed little (see Map 3.3). Arabs make up 75–80 percent of the country's 26 million people, Kurds 15–20 percent, and Turkoman, Assyrians, and others 5 percent. Iraqi demographics also reveal the youth bulge characteristic of many developing countries with 39 percent of the population under the age of 14. Religion further divides Iraq's people. While 97 percent of Iraqis




| Ethnic Group | Estimated Population | Also Found In | Religion | Language |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arabs | 16 to 20 million | Throughout North Africa and the Middle East, Iran | 65-80 percent Shia, 20-30 percent Sunni, less than 5 percent Christian | Arabic (Iraqi dialect) |
| Kurds | 3.6 to 4.8 million | Turkey, Iran, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan | Mostly Sunni, Shia, and Yazidi minority | Kurdish |
| Turkomans | 300,000 to 800,000 | Related to other Turkic peoples in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan | Primarily Sunni | South Azeri Turkish |
| Others | As many as 1 million | Mostly Christians, Iranians, and other groups found in the Middle East | At least 50 percent Christian; Shias, Sunnis, and members of other religions account for the balance | Mostly Arabic, some Persian and other languages |

**Map 3.3**

*Source:* Central Intelligence Agency, 2003.

practice Islam, the majority of them (60–65 percent) belong to the Shi'a tradition, a minority sect in the larger Muslim world. Although Sunni Arabs and Kurds belong to the predominant branch of Islam, ethnic animosity divides them. Kurds suffered inordinately at the hands of Saddam Hussein. Other than a shared resentment of Sunni Arab domination, the more secular Kurds have little in common with their Shi'a countrymen, many of whom would prefer a theocratic state under control of their religious leaders.[40]

While religion has not caused the violent struggle between Sunni and Shi'a Iraqis, it does define the biggest fault-line in contemporary Iraq. Understanding Islam is, therefore, crucial to understanding the war. Islam is the third monotheism that claims descent from Abraham. In Arabic, "Islam" means "submission to the will of Allah." "Allah" is the Arabic word for God, the equivalent of the Hebrew "Elohim." A "Muslim" is "one who submits" to the will of Allah. Like Judaism, Islam rejects the Christian trinity; like Christianity, the religion seeks converts. However, Islam prohibits forced conversion of either Christians or Jews, whom it considers "people of the book," recipients of God's true revelation. Historically, Muslims have been more tolerant of Jews and Christians than Christians have been of Muslims or Jews. The *Holy Quran*, revealed to the Prophet Mohammed by the Archangel Gabriel beginning in 610 CE, contains the same truths given first to Moses and then to Jesus. According to Islam, the followers of these great prophets corrupted God's word. Out of love for humanity, God revealed the truth one last time to Mohammed, "the Messenger of God," also called "the seal [last] of the prophets."

The division of Islam into Sunni and Shi'a sects began as a dispute over succession. Once the Prophet gained control of Medina and Mecca, he exercised both religious and secular authority, which could not be separated in the ancient world. When he died, Mohammed's followers argued over who should succeed him. Most believed that the Muslim *Sunnah* (traditions) should be upheld by one of Mohammed's followers chosen by the principal of *shura* (consultation). The designation "Sunni" derives from "Sunnah." Another group led by Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law Ali insisted that the *Caliph* (successor) must be a member of the Prophet's family. Ali claimed the title for himself and his progeny, Mohammed's only direct descendents. Supporters of this claim called themselves "partisans of Ali," "*Shi'a*" in Arabic. In 658 Ali became the fourth Caliph. Following his assassination in 661, Sunnis controlled the Caliphate until Mustafa Kemal, the father of modern Turkey, abolished the Ottoman Sultanate in 1924.

Doctrinal differences also divide Sunni and Shi'a Islam. One religious tenet in particular profoundly affects the Iraq conflict. Shi'a imams (Arabic for "leaders" but applied to clerics) have greater authority than their

Sunni counterparts to interpret the *Holy Quran* and regulate Muslim life. Most Shi'a believe that Allah has sent twelve imams beginning with Ali himself and ending with Muhammad Ali Mahdi. Born in 868, Ali Mahdi disappeared from human view in 874 and will return to complete the work of making Islam the world's one true religion. Until that time, deeply religious scholars known as *Ayatollahs* (sign of God) exercise authority over Shi'a Muslims. The 1979 Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran demonstrated the political power these men could wield. The threat the Iranian example posed was not lost on Saddam Hussein, who executed Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in 1980. The authority of Shi'a clerics explains why Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Husaini Sistani and Muktada al-Sadr have become power brokers in contemporary Iraq.

Since 9/11, many Americans have wondered whether Islam condones or even promotes violence to a degree not found in other religions. The Iraq war has intensified this concern. Like other world religions, Islam promotes peace and teaches God's unqualified love for all people, and like other religions, its followers have used the faith to justify violence. Those who point to *jihad* (usually mistranslated as "Holy War") as evidence of the Muslim propensity for violence would do well to consider the original meaning of "crusade." The Holocaust has deep roots in Christian anti-Semitism, and ultra-orthodox Jews, heavily represented in West Bank settlements, have found religious justification for persecuting Palestinians. Until the U.S. invasion, all of Iraq's leaders have been secular Sunni Arabs. Saddam Hussein, the least observant of any Muslim ruler, murdered in the name of power, not Islam. The Prophet did proclaim two forms of jihad (better understood as "holy struggle," or "struggle for righteousness"): the "lesser jihad" of defensive warfare and the "greater jihad" each Muslim undergoes to live a devout life. He also insisted that in warfare every effort must be made to spare women, children, and noncombatants. These truths notwithstanding, a powerful strain of contemporary Islam fuels terrorism and adds to the violence in Iraq.

This extremist ideology has a complex relationship to broader Islam, a relationship grossly oversimplified by the Western media. Al-Qaeda preaches a fanatical brand of Islam known as *Jihadist-Salafism.* Derived from the Arabic word *salaf* (devout ancestor), *Salafism* began as a ninth century revival movement seeking to take Islam back to its roots, restoring the *uma* (community of believers) of the seventh century of the common era. Salafism achieved its fullest expression in the teaching of the fourteenth-century scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, who taught that, contrary to the teachings of mainstream Sunni Islam, subjects should rebel against heretical leaders.[41] Salafist revivals occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and again in late twentieth and early twenty-first

centuries. Osama bin Laden and his followers subscribe to a more extremist form of Salafism developed during the Afghan war against the Soviets, *Jihadist-Salafism.*[42] Violent extremists make up a tiny percentage of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, but they draw support from a broader movement known as "Islamism." Al-Qaeda has appropriated some beliefs held by Islamism, also called "the New Islamic discourse." In general, *Islamists* advocate government by some form of *shura* (council) under *sharia* (Islamic law), reject western socialism and nationalism as inappropriate for Muslim states, believe in gender complimentarity but not equality, and deeply resent Western (and in particular American) interference in the affairs of Muslim countries.[43] Both Islamism and Jihadist-Salafism would increase dramatically in Iraq after the invasion.

On the eve of that invasion, Shi'a and Sunni communities in Iraq were by no means monolithic. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is the most important religious leader of Iraqi Shi'as, but Muktada al-Sadr also commands a significant following, aided by respect for his martyred father-in-law. Although Sunni Arabs, particularly educated people in urban areas, were often secular, many would be radicalized through contact with foreign *mujahedeen* (holy warriors) and their own radical clerics. Government policy not withstanding, Shi'a and Sunni did not universally hate one another. Before the war many people lived in mixed neighborhoods. A web of family, clan, and regional loyalties operated within and sometimes across the religious divide as did a complex social network of tribes, lineages, and *khamsahs* (vengeance groups). Patronage networks, through which the regime doled out favors, jobs, and assets, overlay these other groupings as did class distinctions.

## A FRAGILE STATE

On the eve of the American invasion Iraq was a unified but fragile state. National identity had always been weak with pan-Arabism working against creation of a purely Iraqi nationalism. Iran's Islamic revolution and Saddam's genocidal policy toward Kurds and Shi'a had weakened whatever unity may have existed. The Gulf War and the ensuing rebellions that Saddam easily crushed combined with a decade of sanctions produced widespread suffering among the Iraqi people and made them angry and bitter toward the United States. The Kurds wanted no part of a unified Iraq, the Shi'a did not wish to be ruled by the Sunni Arabs, and the Sunni Arabs feared loss of power and the retribution that might follow majority Shi'a rule. These circumstances did not bode well for an American invasion and occupation. Once taken, Iraq could easily collapse around them like a house of cards.

# CHAPTER 4

# FROM SHOCK AND AWE TO CLEAR AND HOLD

## REALITIES, PLANS, AND ASSUMPTIONS

Military strategy must be based on known and immutable realities and reasonable assumptions that flow logically from them. Because assumptions often turn out to be wrong, good plans allow for contingencies; they take into account the "what-ifs" of warfare. As the great Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder astutely observed, "No plan survives contact with the enemy."

In the case of Iraq, decision-makers either overlooked or ignored realities that contradicted what they wished to believe and then formulated a host of dubious assumptions upon which to build a campaign plan. These assumptions soon became articles of faith that could not be questioned. Anyone who challenged the prevailing creed or asked uncomfortable "what-if" questions found him/herself accused of disloyalty and either marginalized or fired. This process inevitably produced an inflexible campaign plan focused on a single objective with little or no consideration of contingencies.

## THE REALITIES

Two realities loomed large as America moved toward war: the nature of the U.S. military and the nature of Iraq. As discussed in chapter 2, the United States had the best conventional force in the world. It had won the Cold War and vanquished Saddam Hussein in less than two months during the 1991 Gulf War. Heavy armored divisions using equipment designed in the 1970s for the central European front formed the core of the ground forces. The Army was just beginning the process of transformation into Maneuver Brigade Combat Teams. The regular forces

had little or no unconventional war fighting experience. COIN had been relegated to the Special Forces community, and senior commanders who had served in Vietnam wanted nothing to do with it. Most of their subordinates had neither studied nor trained for this type of warfare.

The complex physical and human geography of Iraq was the other immutable reality that confronted planners. For reasons discussed in Chapter 3, 20 years of war, genocide, oppressions, and sanctions had left the country in a fragile state. Deep ethnic and religious divisions separated its people and gave them little stake in a unified Iraq unless their specific group controlled it. The physical terrain presented equally formidable challenges. Iraq encompasses 437,000 square miles, just over twice the territory of Idaho. The country has 2,268 miles of land borders, including a 906 mile frontier with Iran and a 376 mile frontier with Syria—two of America's most implacable adversaries in the region.[1] The Syrian border runs through remote desert areas with Bedouin from the same tribes living on both sides and crossing unrestricted. The Iranian border stretches through a variety of terrain ranging from desert to mountain. Both would be extremely difficult to monitor, even harder to control, and impossible to seal. Seventy-five percent of Iraq's population live in urban areas concentrated along the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley. Only two major highways link the port of Umm Qsar and Baghdad some 300 miles away.

Iraq's climate is no more hospitable than its terrain. Cold winters with some freezing temperatures give way to hot, humid summers during which temperatures routinely reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Sandstorms during the summer make travel difficult and increase wear and tear on equipment. Ninety percent of Iraq's rain falls between November and April, most of it between December and March, often in torrential downpours. Operating in full "battle rattle" during summer heat would be very difficult. Soldiers would need to consume a great deal of water that would have to be brought in by road or air.

Unfortunately, the U.S. government had limited information on the situation within Iraq. For years, the intelligence community had neglected human intelligence in favor of high-tech information gathering. It had few, if any, assets on the ground inside Iraq. To fill this gap the administration turned to Iraq's large diaspora community. Saddam's brutal regime had driven at least 3 million Iraqis into exile.[2] Unfortunately, those exiles the administration consulted tended to be well educated, secular, and out of touch with life in contemporary Iraq. Some had not lived in the country for years or even decades. Many also had their own agendas. The Iraqi National Congress created in 1992 and led by Ahmad Chalabi received as much as $27 billion, first to provide the U.S. government

intelligence and then to prepare for the transition to democracy once Saddam fell.[3] These exiles either believed their version of the truth based on out-of-date or inaccurate information or got in the habit of telling American officials what they wished to hear—probably both.

President George W. Bush inherited the Iraq problem, but viewed the threat it posed very differently than did his predecessor. The justification (or, as many would say, the "pretext") for war has been the subject of extensive and acrimonious debate that need not be rehashed here. During the 2000 presidential election, then-Governor Bush criticized the Clinton administration for allowing Saddam to remain in power. He came into office wanting to remove the dictator but probably had no immediate plan to do so. The 9/11 attacks, of course, changed everything. After the removal of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, Iraq moved to the top of the target list in the Global War on Terrorism. Based on what virtually all observers outside the administration have described as flawed intelligence, the administration claimed that Saddam possessed biological, chemical, and at least the means to build nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMD). They also claimed that Saddam had ties with al-Qaeda (an even more dubious assertion) and might provide terrorists with WMD to use against the United States. The president dismissed any challenge to these conclusions with the dire warning that "we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."[4] The administration had long since adopted its policy of preemption, so by the fall of 2002, war looked inevitable.

Going to war on such a pretext need not have led to the current difficulties, but it has adversely affected the campaign. Lack of a compelling case for war robbed the United States of the legitimacy it enjoys in Afghanistan. Neither the United Nations nor NATO would approve the invasion, so America went to war without enough of the right allies, those with significant military capability. During the Gulf War, the first President Bush assembled a coalition made up of real partners. Britain, France, Canada, and Italy contributed substantial contingents. Equally important, Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, and Syria, sent troops that added legitimacy if not weight to the coalition. In 2003, his son mustered a coalition of the reluctant and the coerced. Britain alone contributed a large, capable contingent. Forty members did sign up, many from the "new" countries of central and eastern Europe, eagerly awaiting U.S. Senate approval of their admission to NATO or hoping they would be admitted during the next round of expansion. Most would send small contingents operating under such restrictive rules of engagement that they could be of little use to the coalition.

## THE ASSUMPTIONS

The war planners certainly understood the strengths of U.S. armed forces. Whether they understood (or even recognized) their weaknesses remains less clear. President Bush's stated rejection of "nation building" as a proper military role and the aversion of the regular forces to COIN appeared to make assessment of unconventional warfare capability unnecessary. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wanted to move full speed ahead on military transformation, which would mean leaner-meaner forces with significant outlays for new equipment. The last thing Rumsfeld wanted was the personnel costs (salary, pension, benefits) of a large army. COIN was labor intensive, so COIN must be avoided. That no insurgency would ensue from a U.S. invasion thus became a mandate, not a realistic assessment of the situation.

That mandate grew from dubious assumptions about Iraq. Based on the testimony of exiles, the 1991 uprisings, and even some reasonable observation of contemporary events, the planners concluded that Iraqis hated but feared Saddam. Only regime stalwarts would defend him while most Iraqis would view the Americans as liberators. From these primary assumptions flowed secondary ones. Given their loathing of the regime, Iraqis leaders unconnected to it would step forward to govern the country. Initially, the administration pinned much of their hope on Chalabi, forgetting that local people who have suffered oppression may resent exiles who have lived in comfort or even luxury. However, if he proved unacceptable, then democratic elections would certainly produce competent leaders. From which community these leaders might be drawn and how the others would accept them received little attention. Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Sri Lanka clearly illustrated the limitations of majority rule in an ethnically divided state.

Beyond assuming that democratic elections would produce competent leaders accepted by the majority of Iraqis in all three communities, the administration also believed that police, firefighters, and civil servants would remain at their posts to keep order and provide services throughout the country even if the central government collapsed. This assumption also flew in the face of historical experience. The collapse of dictatorships often produces paralysis. Unaccustomed to acting without orders and fearful of taking initiative, government officials simply stop functioning. No one understood this better than National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, who as a Soviet scholar had studied the aftermath of Joseph Stalin's death.[5] Based on the dubious assumption that the Iraqi government and bureaucracy would continue to function at all but the top level, however, the administration assumed American troops would not need to maintain law and order, guard facilities, or deliver vital services.

## THE PLANNERS

Contemporary military planning divides a campaign into four phases: deployment (I), initial operations (II), main offensive (III), and post-conflict activities (IV). Phase IV might include anything from a smooth hand-over of authority to protracted humanitarian relief and recovery. Primary responsibility for military planning lay with the regional commander in whose theater the operation would take place. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would assist him, providing both advice and resources. The Secretary of Defense should be responsible for oversight and implementation of war plans. The generals answered to him, and he could have input on the plan, especially when political issues arose, but he normally left the details to the soldiers. The Secretary of Defense, of course, reported to the president. To make sure that the Commander in Chief got military advice directly from a soldier, the Goldwater-Nichols Act had given the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) direct access to the President. This at least is how the system *should* work.

Historically, some Secretaries of Defense have been stronger than others. A few have interfered in military planning, usually with disastrous results. Robert McNamara provides perhaps the best example of the dangers of civilian micromanagement. However, the Goldwater-Nichols Act had specifically aimed to prevent a recurrence of what happened in the Vietnam-era Pentagon. Donald Rumsfeld nonetheless circumvented the spirit if not the letter of that law. By all accounts, he is a strong personality, a tough bureaucratic infighter who intimidated and overawed most subordinates. He got compliant people appointed to key positions, especially the critical post of CJCS. When Army General Hugh Shelton's term expired, Rumsfeld succeeded in getting Air Force General Richard Myers appointed instead of President Bush's first choice, the more forceful Admiral Vernon Clark.[6] Arizona Republican Senator John McCain once observed following Rumsfeld's testimony that he saw no need to hear from Myers, whom he considered incapable of expressing an independent thought.[7] Long after Iraq had soured, one Bush administration official commented even more harshly on Rumsfeld's selection of compliant CJCSs: "You wind up with smiling Pete Pace and smiling Richard Myers."[8] Marine Corps General Peter Pace, who succeeded Myers in September 2005, would prove to be just as much a yes-man as his predecessor. In June 2007, Robert Gates, the new Secretary of Defense announced that he would not support a second term for Pace.

The ability of Rumsfeld and his powerful undersecretaries, Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, to dominate the uniformed services owed much to President Bush's management style. Most analysts have described him as hands-off to the point of not even forcing cabinet secretaries and advisors to reconcile clear differences of opinion so that he could make a

truly informed decision. His closest advisors Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney, and close friend Condoleezza Rice (National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State) not only counseled the President but also limited the access of others to him.[9] Leslie Gelb, who saw firsthand the affects of group-think in the Lyndon Johnson White House during the Vietnam War, described Bush as "Johnson squared." "We're talking about a guy essentially cut off from all information except the official line," she concluded.[10]

The one soldier Rumsfeld could not easily intimidate or overawe had immediate responsibility for planning the invasion of Iraq. Four-star General Tommy Franks had succeeded Anthony Zinni as Commander of Central Command (CENTCOM) in July 2000. Franks had considerable combat experience as a junior officer in Vietnam and as a divisional commander in the Gulf War. He belonged to the cadre of officers who rebuilt the army after Vietnam and the draft had damaged it. The troops considered him a soldier's soldier who looked after their interests. He also was no sycophant. If anyone could have stood up to the Secretary of Defense, it should have been Tommy Franks. His memoir presents a clear image of a highly competent conventional soldier with little understanding of unconventional war in general and COIN in particular, except as something to be avoided. He also resented what he considered inference from the Joint Chiefs, whom he once derisively called "Title Ten Motherfuckers," (a reference to the Gold-Water Nichols Act).[11] Like the army he led into Iraq, Tommy Franks was a product of decisions made in the 1970s, the kind of soldier the nation had asked for to win the Cold War.

## THE EXISTING PLAN

Given the long-standing animosity between the United States and Saddam Hussein, the Pentagon had drafted a plan for invading Iraq long before President George W. Bush took office. The existence of such a plan cannot be interpreted as clear evidence of intent to invade, since the Pentagon drafts and updates a large number of contingency plans. In 1998, then-CENTCOM Commander Anthony Zinni drafted O[perations] PLAN 1003-98 for an invasion and occupation of Iraq. Zinni worried far less about defeating the Iraqi armed forces than he did about managing the postwar country. He feared that a precipitous collapse or overthrow of Saddam's regime would create a power vacuum the U.S. could not immediately fill. OPLAN 1003-98 called for an invasion force of 380,000 combat troops supported by more than 20,000 others, bringing the total to over 400,000.[12] Zinni warned that it might take ten years to stabilize Iraq. Based on his experience as commander of the Unified Task Force in Somalia, Zinni also understood the concept of psychological dominance.

Besides protecting infrastructure and maintaining security, a large force deployed throughout the country would overawe any opposition groups considering violent resistance. Preventing insurgency is much easier than countering it.

In the spring of 1999, CENTCOM tested the OPLAN in a seminar exercise code-named "Desert Crossing." The exercise explored all aspects of invading Iraq and facilitating transition to democracy. They determined that preserving the unity of the country would be challenging and that the transitional authority would have to reconcile competing visions of its governance. The seminar recognized the need to form a strong alliance including Arab states before invading since unilateral American intervention would be resented within Iraq and the larger region. Participants also noted the pivotal role Iran could play as either a spoiler or a facilitator of stability. The seminar emphasized the importance of maintaining delivery of vital goods and services, especially food and potable water. While they concluded that local administration had the potential to continue meeting these needs, they worried that circumstances might lead to a breakdown.

> There are many technocrats (not bureaucrats) and other industrious people in Iraq who have been able to maintain a modicum of services to their compatriots. Such persons should be identified and considered for serving in transitional governments as their areas are secured. Principals [seminar participants] expressed concern that if the crisis were to become protracted and destructive to the infrastructure, or particularly violent, these core persons may be lost—another reason for the intervention to be swift, large-scale, and decisive.[13]

The Rumsfeld Pentagon ignored virtually every recommendation of "Desert Crossing," particularly the admonition to invade with a large enough force to secure the country, maintain law and order, and ensure the delivery of vital goods and services. As a result, most of the seminar's worst-case scenarios have become reality.

## WAR BY NUMBERS

When the White House asked General Franks to begin working on a plan for Iraq, he reviewed Zinni's OPLAN 1003-98. Rumsfeld objected to the size of the contingent. Based on the experience of Afghanistan, he believed that a much smaller force could do the job. By the time he briefed the President in Crawford, Texas on September 22, 2002, Franks had accepted the idea of a smaller force although troop strength had not been agreed. He told the President that OPLAN 1003-98 was "basically Desert Storm II." Asked his opinion of Zinni's plan, Franks replied, "Mr. President, it's outdated. It calls for troop levels of at least four

hundred thousand, which would require a very visible six-month force buildup. That would definitely eliminate operational surprise."[14]

It would be easy to conclude in retrospect that Zinni was right and Franks wrong. The reality is a bit more complicated. Zinni based his plan on the assumption that the invasion force would have to secure and occupy the country. Under heavy pressure from Rumsfeld, Franks focused almost entirely on defeating the Iraqi armed forces. Based on that assumption, however unrealistic it may have been, a small force could do the job. Twenty-first century warfare distinguished between overwhelming force based upon mass (number of troops) and overmatching power that made use of technology, intelligence, "jointness" (services branches working as an integrated whole), speed, and smaller mass to achieve a decisive result against a numerically superior enemy.[15] Those advocating a small invasion force also presumed (based on little evidence) that Iraqi units would put up only weak resistance and surrender in droves. They counted on SOF units supporting tribal uprisings and hoped the Shi'a in the south would rise against the regime as the Americans crossed the frontier. They also expected Chalabi's free Iraqi forces to fight well and serve as a rallying point for Iraqi resistance. Any of these eventualities could have reduced the size of the U.S. invasion force; collectively they might have justified significant U.S. troop reductions. Unfortunately, none of these hoped-for eventualities occurred. Nevertheless, two days after 9/11, the Pentagon began work on a new plan dubbed "Vigilant Guardian," which would have launched an invasion force of 75,000–100,000 troops.[16]

The assumption that the invasion force could simply "come, fight, and leave" was wildly unrealistic, and Franks probably knew it. In the ensuing months his staff revised the plan several times. Rumsfeld's objections always centered on troop strength and deployment time. He consistently maintained that a much smaller force could achieve the same result as a larger one by exploiting speed and surprise. By January 2002, CENTCOM had arrived at a plan calling for a 30-day buildup of 145,000 troops to launch the invasion while more troops arrived, building to 275,000 as the campaign progressed, a total far below that of OPLAN 1003-98 but far above that of Vigilant Guardian.[17] Rumsfeld still wanted fewer troops, so Franks proposed a buildup to 160,000 troops over 60 days during which the air campaign would take place. He would launch the ground campaign on day 45 by which time he should have well over 100,000 combat troops.[18] Rumsfeld continued to oppose the troop strength, so Franks offered an alternative. He had based previous plans on the concept of a "generated start": build forces to the required level and then attack. He now suggested a "Running Start" in which the invasion forces would attack with a critical mass of troops but before the rest of the invasion

force deployed. Arriving troops would be fed in to keep the advance going. This approach closely resembles the on-demand supply system used by most retailers. Goods arrive on the shelf as needed, greatly reducing storage costs. Running Start allowed the ground commander to exploit an opportune moment to attack without waiting for a specific calendar date. It also enabled Rumsfeld to stop the troop flow when he decided the operation needed no more soldiers, and, for that reason, the Secretary liked the plan.

Military planners, however, had serious reservations about Running Start. They questioned the assumption that the troop flow could be maintained and warned that the invasion might grind to halt if it could not. The CENTCOM staff went back to the drawing board and came up with a "Hybrid Plan" to reconcile objections to both Grounded Start and Running Start. Under this plan the president would give the military five days to mobilize and 11 days to deploy before beginning a 16-day air campaign. By the end of the air campaign, the commanders would have 20,000 combat troops with which to launch the ground assault. Troops would continue to flow into theater for up to 125 days. Because of its timetable, the Pentagon referred to the Hybrid Plan as the 5-11-16-125 Plan.[19] While the Pentagon and the White House approved the plan, many soldiers continued to have reservations about the small size of the invasion force.

While planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom took place in secret, the debate over troop strength could not easily be hidden. Whatever final shape the invasion plan took, Americans knew by early 2003 that they would be invading and occupying Iraq with fewer than half the number of soldiers deployed for the more modest task of evicting Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991. The Uniform Code of Military Justice prohibits serving officers from commenting on policy while loyalty and professionalism usually deter retired officers from offering their opinions except in times of crisis. Generals can, however, be called to testify before Congress. In February 2003, the Senate Committee on Armed Services asked Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric Shinseki to comment on the number of troops necessary for the Iraq mission. Concerned about the need to occupy and maintain the country after defeating its armed forces, Shinseki said the United States needed a much larger force than that being considered. Asked to be more specific on how many were needed, the General responded, "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers."[20] A furious Rumsfeld sent Paul Wolfowitz to Capital Hill to rebut Shinseki's testimony.

Disagreement also occurred within the Bush Cabinet. Secretary of State General Colin Powell (Ret.) expressed concerns similar to those of Shinseki. Powell refrained from any public statement until leaving office. In his first interview after stepping down, he told London's *Daily*

*Telegraph* that the United States had deployed "enough troops for war but not for peace, for establishing order. My own preference would have been for more forces after the conflict." Powell said he told Bush in August 2002 that Iraq "will crack like a goblet and it will be a problem to pick up the bits."[21] As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War, Powell gained the respect of the Armed Forces, politicians on both sides of the aisle, and the American public. As the only member of the administration with combat experience, his opinions should have carried more weight. However, the Secretary of State's views reflected the "Powell Doctrine" of overwhelming force that Rumsfeld had rejected.

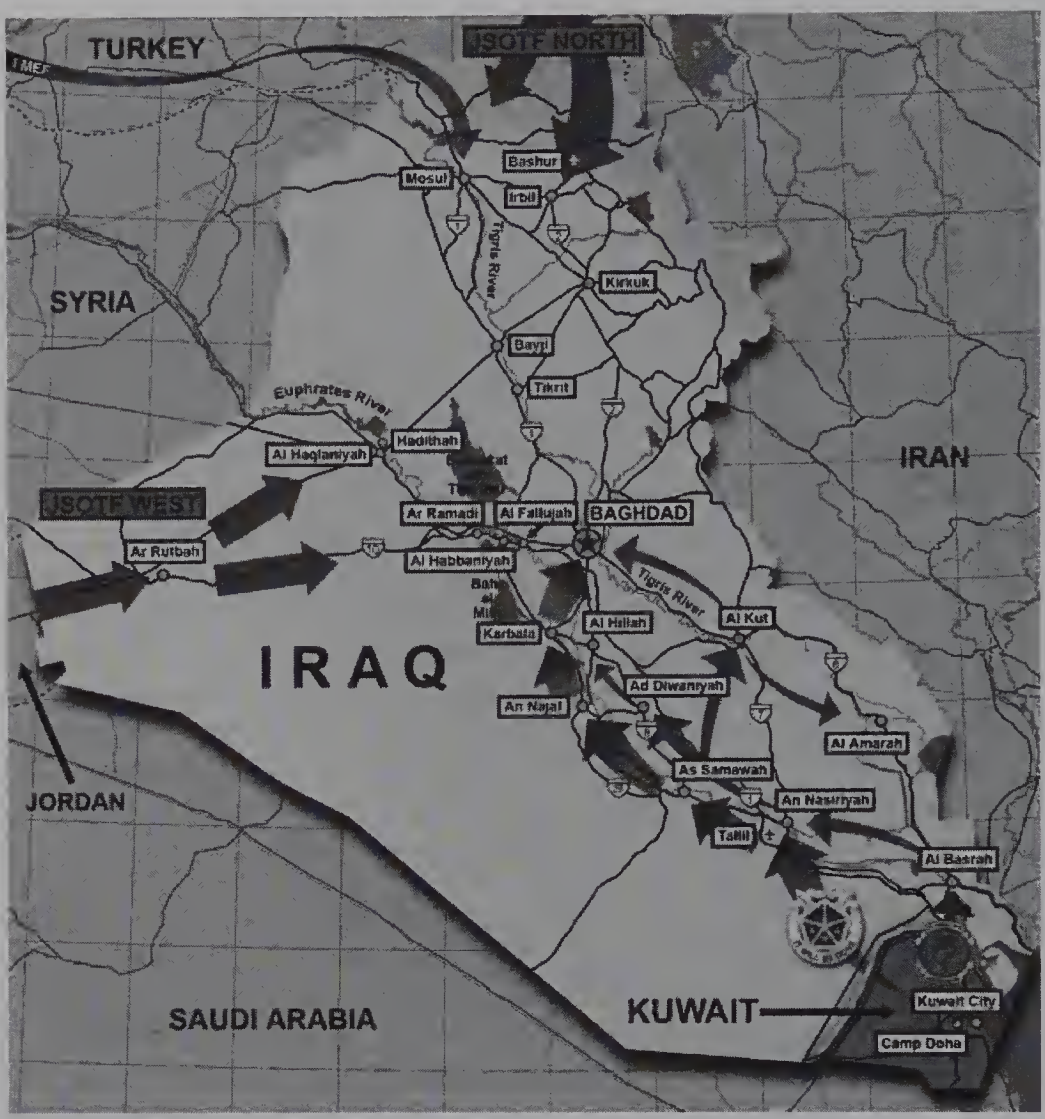
## COBRA II

The Coalition Land Forces (CLF) Commander General David McKiernan did succeed in getting Franks to modify significantly the Hybrid Plan. The final plan, dubbed "COBRA II," shortened the 16-day air campaign and had a significantly larger land component on the ground before the start of the invasion. By "G-Day" (start of the ground offensive), McKiernan would have 115,000 U.S. and 26,000 British troops deploy to Kuwait.[22] The 4th Infantry Division (18,000–20,000) would deploy to southeastern Turkey in order to attack Iraq from the north while a Joint Special Forces Task Force (JSFTF) would operate out of Jordan (see map 4.1).

COBRA II called for a short, sharp air campaign followed immediately by a ground assault. The Army V Cops would advance up the western side of the Tigris-Euphrates while the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) drove north along the eastern side. The British Expeditionary Force would advance north and then wheel east to seize Basra and the Faw Peninsula. Meanwhile, the 4th Infantry Division would drive southeast to seize Mosul and occupy Kurdistan. Long before the invasion kicked off, JSFTF forces would have moved from Jordan into western Iraq to preempt any attempt by Saddam Hussein to launch Scud missiles at Israel. Other SOF forces would operate throughout Iraq before and during the invasion. A last minute decision by the Turkish parliament denied permission for U.S. forces to invade Iraq from Turkey. The 4th Infantry Division had to be rerouted from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. In transit when the invasion began, the unit took no part in the initial fighting.

## THE VEXING PROBLEM OF PHASE IV

COBRA II focused almost exclusively on conventional war fighting with SOF forces operating in support of the main effort. It was not a comprehensive plan because it covered only the first three Phases of the operation, from preparation through the end of major hostilities.




**Map 4.1**

*Source:* COBRA II invasion plan, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*

General Franks considered that the military's job would be largely finished with the achievement of Phase III goals: "regime forces defeated or capitulated, and regime leaders dead, apprehended or marginalized."[23] For him, Phase IV meant relief, recovery, and reconstruction, tasks soldiers might support but should not do themselves. "I was aware that Phase IV might well prove more challenging than major combat operations," Franks wrote in his memoir.

> This phase would draw heavily on our Information, Political-Military lines of operation—including a massive Humanitarian Assistance effort—an expensive site exploitation (investigation and analysis) by WMD and intelligence experts. Also critical would be the support we hoped to secure from

the international community, and from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).[24]

Significantly, the CENTCOM Commander made no mention of insurgency, civil war, or even lawlessness as serious postwar challenges. He did, however, clearly delineate the boundary between military and civilian roles. "It's beyond the purview of the military to conduct international negotiations to establish a broad-based provisional government that the people would accept once the regime is removed," he concluded. "But the State Department did a great job with a similar challenge in Afghanistan." Franks noted Rumsfeld's obvious discomfort when the general began talking about a topic "outside his lane" (i.e., postwar Iraq).[25]

Rumsfeld's discomfort may have stemmed from mention of the State Department. While he had no desire to engage in nation building, neither did he wish to relinquish control of Phase IV. He argued for the need to maintain unity of command throughout the entire operation. This valid argument notwithstanding, many of his critics see Rumsfeld's insistence on making post-conflict operations a Department of Defense show as further evidence of his need to control everything and his penchant for micromanagement. Whatever his motives, Rumsfeld got control of Phase IV and with it responsibility for postwar Iraq. This responsibility did not, however, alter his commitment to keeping the invasion forces as small as possible and withdrawing troops from Iraq as soon as he could. Neither the Pentagon nor the White House wished to see U.S. forces tied down in a protracted nation-building mission. They continued to believe that, after the fall of Saddam and a brief period of transition, power could be handed over to an interim Iraqi government bolstered by international aid, UN support, and limited American presence.

Nothing more clearly indicates the low priority given to Phase IV than the late date at which preparation for it commenced. CENTCOM had been working on the invasion plan for more than a year before it commenced. Planning for postwar activities did not begin in earnest until a few months before G-Day. In January 2003, National Security Presidential Directive 24 (NSPD-24) created an Iraqi Post-war Planning Office within the Department of Defense. To head the office Bush chose retired Lt. General Jay Garner. Garner took the potential challenges of postwar Iraq far more seriously than Rumsfeld and his closest advisors. In February he convened a team of experts to discuss what to do with the defeated country. The group immediately concluded that they had been convened far too late and that the invasion force had too few troops for the task of maintaining law and order, securing infrastructure, and safeguarding humanitarian aid. "We risk letting the country descend into civil unrest, chaos whose magnitude may defeat our national strategy of a stable new Iraq," one participant concluded. "And more immediately, we place

our own troops fully engaged in the forward fight, in greater jeopardy."[26] No sooner did Garner begin to plan and organize for Phase IV than Rumsfeld and company started to interfere with his plans. The Secretary of Defense objected to Garner's use of non-Department of Defense personnel, no matter how badly Garner needed their skills. Assistant Secretary of Defense, Douglas Feith got upset that the General showed insufficient regard for Ahmad Chalabi. Garner finally became so exasperated that he said, "Doug, you've go two choices. You can shut the fuck up, or you can fire me."[27]

As a result of their late start, insufficient personnel, inadequate resources, and constant interference from Rumsfeld and his subordinates, Garner's team left for Kuwait without a viable plan for handling postwar Iraq and the host of problems that might arise once conventional hostilities ceased. They tried to make the best of a bad situation, but received little encouragement. When Lawrence Di Rita visited Kuwait as Rumsfeld's envoy, Colonel Paul Hughes told him about the Phase IV strategy paper he was preparing with Garner's team. Di Rita told him to "forget it" because the United States would win the war and be out of Iraq within 120 days.[28] Phase IV planning had thus not gotten very far before the United States entered Baghdad. The invasion force arrived unprepared to protect critical infrastructure, provide security, or insure the delivery of vital services. Beyond these immediate concerns, no one seems to have seriously considered the prospect that an insurgency would challenge the occupation and compete with any fledgling government or that Iraq would descend into civil war.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Pundits have already weighed in on who bears primary responsibility for the invasion plan, and historians will analyze the decision-making process for years to come with access to documents unavailable to contemporary writers. Enough evidence has already come to light, however, to draw at least one poignant conclusion: Rumsfeld and his civilian advisors made the decision to go in with a relatively small force and no adequate postwar occupation plan. The civilians trumped the soldiers at almost every turn. The Secretary of Defense ignored the best advice of his generals and treated disagreement as disloyalty. This approach forced good officers into silence or retirement and promoted those who would salute and say, "Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!" to use an old army saying. Rumsfeld consistently pushed for the smallest possible force and discouraged Phase IV planning. By all accounts, the president never questioned the secretary's decisions or sought a second opinion from a general not under Rumsfeld's sway.

Although the shortcomings of COBRA II resulted primarily from *policy* failures rather than military ones, senior officers bear some responsibility for what transpired. General Shinseki aired his concerns; General Franks said nothing. He and his CENTCOM staff took the invasion plan through several iterations, paring down the numbers at each turn. Had it not been for General McKiernan's insistence, the invasion force would have been even smaller. Franks's willingness to acquiesce to Rumsfeld on almost every issue raises a disturbing question: at what point does a commander have a moral obligation to resign and go public with his reasons for leaving rather than implement a flawed plan that he knows puts his soldiers at unnecessary risk?[29]

## INVASION

Failure to prepare for Phase IV and the dire consequences that resulted notwithstanding, the U.S. military conducted a highly successful conventional campaign to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The American-led coalition achieved operational surprise, kept the use of force (in particular aerial bombardment) focused and limited, and destroyed the Iraqi military rapidly and efficiently. They took great pains to minimize civilian casualties and to avoid unnecessary damage to critical infrastructure. After a short, sharp air campaign, the ground invasion kicked off and reached Baghdad in record time, sweeping aside Iraqi units, often without killing very many of their soldiers. Special Operations forces had already been sent in to persuade Iraqi commanders to surrender and to seize bridges and other key assets.

Desire to achieve surprise shaped the air campaign. Rather than engaging in the long preparatory period of bombardment that preceded Desert Storm in 1991, CENTCOM launched a brief period of intense but highly focused aerial bombardment. During the first Gulf War, the air campaign systematically degraded Iraqi military capability. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the air campaign focused on decapitation, eliminating command and control and communications as a prelude to a rapid ground assault that would catch Iraqi forces off guard. COBRA II also called for the ground offensive to kick off before the most intense part of the air campaign.

Surprise would achieve two important objectives. By catching the Iraqi military off guard, it would compensate for the numbers the invasion forced lacked. American and British troops would never face a massed Iraqi army but would defeat its units in detail (one at a time or in small numbers). Surprise would also, CENTCOM hoped, preempt Saddam's plans to torch oil wells as he had done prior to withdrawing from Kuwait in 1991. Precision-guided munitions had increased in both quality and

quantity since the Gulf War. Only about 10 percent of the bombs used in Desert Storm were "smart" as opposed to 68 percent for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The air campaign began on March 19 with a decapitation strike to kill Saddam Hussein and senior Iraqi leaders. The effort failed because intelligence on the dictator's whereabouts proved inaccurate. Over the next few days, coalition air and naval forces flew 1,500–2,000 sorties a day and deployed 100 air- and 500 sea-launched cruise missiles. Besides aiming to kill Iraqi leaders, they targeted air defense systems, surface to air missiles sites, and artillery batteries. As the ground campaign commenced, close air support increased as a proportion of the total sorties flown, although strategic bombardment continued. The most intense bombing, the night of "shock and awe," began the same day as the ground offensive.[30]

Army and Marine units advanced into Iraq on the morning of March 21. Accurate intelligence revealed Iraqi regular army units concentrated along Highway 6 between Umm Qsar and Kut, providing a defense in depth along that invasion route. Saddam deployed most of his elite Republican Guard and additional regular units in a defensive perimeter around Baghdad but detailed one division to Mosul and another to Kirkuk. He sent the rest of the regular army units north to defend against the anticipated invasion by the 4th Division out of Turkey, which never came. The U.S. Army V Corps and the Marine Expeditionary Force bypassed the main Iraqi units by using Highways 7, 1, and 8 to advance north along the west, center, and east of the Tigris-Euphrates valley (see map 4.1).

The invasion force advanced rapidly, securing oil fields before Saddam could set them on fire and sweeping aside what resistance it encountered. In less than a week, U.S. troops were within 60 miles of Baghdad. They entered the city on April 5 and secured it four days later, though sporadic fighting continued for some time. On April 7, British forces secured Basra. To compensate for loss of the Turkish invasion route, McKiernan deployed the 101st Airborne to the north. These troops combined with SOF formations and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters defeated Iraqi units in the north. The Kurds took Kirkuk on April 11. On April 14, the Pentagon declared major ground operations over.

Victory had not only been swift, it had come at a relatively low cost, at least in lives. U.S. forces suffered 138 killed and 542 wounded.[31] Iraqi casualties are far more difficult to determine. A report published by the Project on Defense Alternatives in the fall of 2003 determined that 7,600–10,800 Iraqi military personnel and 3,250–4,250 civilians died during the invasion.[32] Iraq Body Count, a Web site that has compiled casualty figures from an extensive and diverse array of open sources,

puts Iraqi civilian deaths during the period of conventional operations at around 7,500.[33] Because many Iraqi soldiers fought out of uniform as guerrillas, some of the dead "civilians" were almost certainly military. In addition, Iraqi units used civilians as human shields, adding considerably to the death toll. However, even the highest casualty estimates do not support accusations that the coalition used excessive force in an indiscriminate manner. On the contrary, American and British troops made every effort to spare Iraqi lives, taking important sites off the air campaign target list if hitting them would kill too many civilians. CLF operated under rules of engagement that required them to make every effort to allow Iraqi troops to surrender, which sometimes put combat troops at risk.

## DISTURBING TRENDS AND WARNING SIGNS

Despite achieving impressive results rapidly, the invasion force encountered problems that called into questions many of the assumptions upon which planning had been based. The troops realized almost immediately the poor quality of U.S. intelligence on Iraq. SOF teams sent into liaise with Iraqi tribes found no one to help them secure bridges and other vital points. Spearhead combat units expecting to see locals waving American flags encountered only armed resistance. Colonel Terry Ferrell, commanding 3rd Battalion, 7th Cavalry sent his superior a terse message as he fought to secure the town of Samawah in Southern Iraq. "This is Saber 6," he radioed headquarters. "There's not a goddamn flag anywhere in sight, but there are artillery rounds and small arms going off all around us."[34] The Shi'a did not rise against the dictator as the CIA hoped they might. They had learned from their bitter experience in 1991 to be wary of U.S. promises.

Not only did Iraqi units fail to surrender in anything like the numbers anticipated, but many fought tenaciously against hopeless odds. Others simply melted away as their soldiers went home, abandoning their heavy equipment but keeping their small arms. As a result, postwar Iraq would be awash in guns, many in the hands of men trained to use them. The conventional war ended without U.S. forces securing or even knowing the whereabouts of many Iraqi troops.

One intelligence failure, though, left American troops relieved. No Iraqi units unleashed WMD on the invaders. If they had, U.S. casualties would have been much higher. The CIA had identified over 900 potential WMD sites, far too many for SOF forces to secure. In addition, the coalition lacked protective suits in sufficient quantity for American troops. Even if they had had enough suits, operating in them would have been problematic. Hermetically sealed suits do not dissipate body heat easily.

Soldiers wearing them would have had to consume even more water than the extraordinary amounts necessary to operated in Iraq's desert heat.

Finally, and most troubling of all, units advancing into Iraq came under attack by bands of partisans, some armed with rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and heavy machine guns. Documents captured after the fall of Baghdad reveal that Saddam Hussein had created cadres of irregulars to fight the invaders and interdict their long supply lines. These units included Ba'ath Party militias and the *Saddam Fedayeen* (Saddam's Martyrs). Although they posed no serious threat to American forces during the invasion, the unanticipated strength and determination of these units boded ill for postwar stabilization. Even more disturbing, some irregulars captured by the invasion force were not even Iraqis. Interrogators soon discovered Syrian fighters among the prisoners of war.[35] These irregular units would become the core of the insurgency that Rumsfeld insisted could not happen.

# CHAPTER 5

# THE LOST YEAR

## A DIFFERENT WAR

The shift from conventional to unconventional war rarely occurs at a specific point in time. And yet, iconic events sometimes symbolize profound change. Such an event occurred in Iraq on April 8, 2003. As the world watched on CNN News, Marine Corporal Edward Chin hoisted an American flag over the statue of Saddam Hussein in downtown Baghdad. Almost immediately, he received a stern admonition to take it down. The Americans were liberators not conquerors. In unconventional conflict the actions of ordinary soldiers often have political implications they rarely do in conventional war. Even before the battle for Baghdad had ended, commanders recognized that the nature of the mission was changing, though they did not immediately understand how.

Most analysts refer to the period from April 2003 to April 2004 as the "lost year," a period of uncertainty in which U.S. forces slowly recognized that, although major hostilities in Iraq had ended, the war was far from over. Initially greeted as liberators, the GIs assumed they would be on their way home in a few months. The country's rapid dissent into lawlessness, which U.S. troops could not prevent, quickly eroded confidence in and respect for the Americans. Widespread looting and the resultant damage to already fragile infrastructure interrupted or stopped completely the flow of vital services including electricity, water, and sanitation. This disruption and the general lawlessness led to widespread unemployment. Ordinary people blamed the precipitous decline in their quality of life not on the Iraqis who actually did the damage, but on the invaders who made it possible by overthrowing their dictator. Amid widespread discontent Ba'ath Party stalwarts, foreign *mujahedeen,* and other elements within Iraq began an organized campaign against the occupiers.

Failure even to consider, let alone plan for, most of what transpired in the immediate aftermath of the regime's collapse had disastrous

consequences. Given little or no guidance from a Pentagon that denied problems even existed, soldiers responded to each situation on an ad hoc basis. Like any other group of human beings faced with an unfamiliar and difficult challenge, they fell back on what they knew best, conventional war fighting. The Army and Marine Corps would pay a heavy price for their neglect of COIN doctrine and training over the preceding decades. The cultural attitudes discussed in chapter 2 would hamper efforts to adapt. Even those commanders and units that figured out how best to handle unforeseen problems also encountered further obstacles caused by bad policy decisions and micromanagement by the same bureaucrats who had interfered with the invasion planning process. The military would eventually get it right, but the period of trial and error would be costly in lives and money. Troop shortages, the consequence of Rumsfeld insistence that the invasion force go in light, would dog efforts to implement an effective COIN strategy.

## LAWLESSNESS AND LOOTING

Although most Iraqis welcomed the collapse of the regime, few accepted responsibility for maintaining the day-to-day functions of civil society. Looting broke out almost immediately following the fall of Baghdad. On the eve of the U.S. invasion Saddam had released thousands of ordinary criminals from Iraqi jails. Their presence contributed to chaos on the streets. However, ordinary Iraqis—frustrated and desperate—did most of the looting, focusing on government buildings and Saddam's palaces. They took everything that was not nailed down and some things that were. They pried fixtures from walls and stripped electrical generators of copper wiring. Looting destroyed or damaged what little remained of Iraqi infrastructure.

Despite the adverse affect of widespread lawlessness, American troops did nothing to stop it. Phase IV planning had not included any preparation for policing. One battalion commander in Baghdad requested clarification on the rules of engagement for dealing with looters. Headquarters told him that there were none, and that the lawlessness would be a "self-correcting problem." The Judge Advocate General Corps in the Pentagon warned officers that they had no arrest powers and could be held accountable for any loss of life they caused trying to exercise control of civilians. Even had they wished to exercise police powers, the soldiers lacked the training to do so. Woefully few military police accompanied the invasion force. The Iraqi police whom Rumsfeld and company had assumed would remain in place doing their jobs did nothing to stop the lawlessness. Collapse of the regime and the flight of top Ba'athist officials encouraged paralysis rather than initiative.

Even if they had been empowered to intervene, the invasion force lacked the troops and equipment to do so. Only 10,000 of the third division's 18,000 troops were available to patrol Baghdad, but only 1,200 of these were dismounted infantry. Since they had fewer than 1,000 suits of body armor, augmenting the foot soldiers with dismounted tank and armored personnel crews would have been difficult. The White House had considered and rejected a proposal to include 5,000 police in the force structure.[1] Tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles were of little use in urban areas.

The widespread looting and pervasive lawlessness lasted a matter of weeks but did years worth of physical and moral damage. The destruction seriously delayed restoration of services and added billions of dollars to the cost of reconstruction. It also hurt Iraqi-American relations. Journalist Richard Engel, who landed in Baghdad before the invasion and remained in place through its immediate occupation, captured the prevailing situation. "There can be no doubt that most Iraqis in Baghdad were genuinely delighted that the Americans ousted Saddam Hussein," Engel wrote.

> It's profoundly disappointing, how quickly the Iraqis' joy and appreciation turned to frustration and in some cases hatred of the Americans. I heard the first anti-American rumblings in Baghdad only one day after the statue [of Saddam] came down. The main problem was the shameful looting that broke out as Baghdad collapsed, and the American's utter inability to stop it. Many Iraqis have subsequently accused the US forces of being unwilling to stop the looters, even of encouraging them, although this isn't true.[2]

The willingness and ability of U.S. forces to protect the Oil Ministry no doubt encouraged belief that they could have protected everything else as well. It also strengthened the popular belief that Washington wanted Iraqi oil more than it did Iraqi freedom.

## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

The conviction that U.S. troops could have stopped the looting and restored vital services offered the first manifestation of a problem that would haunt the reconstruction effort. Iraqis who had witnessed the awesome firepower of the U.S. military during the invasion had respect for America's impressive technology and vast resources. They could not understand or accept the slow pace of reconstruction. A country that could put a cruise missile through the door of a building from 500 miles away, they believed, could restore electricity and provide clean drinking water if it wanted to do so. The Americans must, therefore, have some ulterior motive in withholding these vital services.[3]

A telling anecdote illustrates just how great expectations might become. At a meeting in one community, an Iraqi man stood up and asked, "When are we going to have air conditioning in our school?" "Did you have air conditioners before in the schools?" the American commander presiding over the meeting asked. "No," the Iraqi replied, "but you have air conditioners in America in your schools."[4] With the broad promises made by the Bush administration, the displays of American wealth clearly visible via television, movies, and the Internet, and the enormous resources of the invasion force, one can forgive ordinary Iraqis for expecting the occupiers to improve the quality of their lives in short order.

## NATURE AND PATTERN OF VIOLENCE

Destructive though it was, the orgy of looting and lawlessness would burn itself out. The organized resistance that started in late spring would not. For the first month of occupation, U.S. forces suffered few casualties from hostile activity. Soldiers died from the vehicle accidents and mishaps that inevitably occur during a large operation. In June, the casualty pattern shifted noticeably with deaths from hostile action surpassing those from accidents, a trend that would continue throughout the year. The monthly tally of deaths attests to the increasing violence: 36 in June, 49 in July, 43 in August, 33 in September, 47 in October, 110 in November, and 48 in December.[5]

The pattern of hostile activities reveals as much as do the raw numbers. Initially, sniper, small arms, and rocket-propelled grenade attacks accounted for most combat deaths. From mid-July, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increasingly took their toll. IEDs consisted of conventional explosives detonated remotely using a cell phone, a wire, or even the remote control for a child's toy as an American patrol or thin-skinned vehicle (such as an unarmored Humvee) passed over it.[6] Over time, Iraqis would design more effective IEDs using shaped charges that could penetrate armor. Most attacks occurred in the area of central Iraq known as the "Sunni triangle," a densely populated area with its base on a line from Baghdad to Ramadi and its apex at Tikrit. Commanders also worried about the large numbers of weapons caches uncovered by U.S. troops and the number of guns in private hands.

## DENIAL

These disturbing trends made little impact on a Pentagon and White House determined to hand over power and exit Iraq quickly. Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld dismissed the growing violence as the work of regime stalwarts who would soon be

eliminated. The President went even further, taunting the supposed Ba'athist diehards to "bring it on." Against the advice of CLF Commander General McKiernan and contrary to the COBRA II campaign plan, Rumsfeld stopped the flow of forces into Iraq after the end of conventional hostilities but before the country had been secured. Amid growing signs of intensifying violence, General Franks announced plans to begin sending troops home so that by September no more than 30,000 would remain.[7]

CENTCOM and the Pentagon adopted a shoot-the-messenger policy toward anyone contradicting their cherished assumptions. As early as March 19, the staff officer responsible for Special Operations Phase IV Plans warned of the need to prepare for the possibility of an Iraqi insurgency. His commanders explicitly told him not to use the terms "insurgency" or "COIN" in his plans. Unwilling to ignore a looming and dangerous reality, he developed a Phase IV concept briefing in which he insisted that the coalition force would face lawlessness, terrorism, insurgency, and faction fighting. Iraqis would soon see the United States as an occupier, not a liberator. To deal with these contingencies, he proposed planning for and rehearsing a protracted COIN campaign and ramping up SOF capability to lead it. Headquarters rejected all of his suggestions even when he repackaged them under the Operational Protection concept to avoid using the taboo term COIN.[8] The administration continued to behave as though it could change reality by executive fiat.

## DISBANDING THE ARMED FORCES AND DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

The unquestioned assumption that no insurgency could occur in Iraq explains the most controversial and problematic decisions of the occupation: disbanding Iraqi security forces and de-Ba'athification. Although it would not admit to the need for a prolonged occupation, the Bush administration did at least recognize that reconstruction was proving to be a more daunting task than Rumsfeld and company had imagined. Jay Garner had moved his Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid (ORHA) to Baghdad in mid-April, but it lacked the resources to deal with the needs of the country. Rather than augment those resources and enhance Garner's authority, building on the work he and his associates had already done, the White House chose to appoint a proconsul in the mold of General Douglas MacArthur in post–World War II Japan. However, L. Paul "Jerry" Bremer, the man Bush chose as his envoy, lacked MacArthur's military experience and judgment, though he shared the White House's urgency to transition to local authority and leave Iraq as soon as possible.

The appointment of Bremer violated a cardinal rule of effective COIN: unity of effort. With proconsular powers, he would report directly to the President outside the normal chains of command for the Departments of State and Defense. Although he had no direct control over U.S. forces, Bremer could and did make decisions profoundly affecting military operations without even consulting the Combined Joint Task Force command. Bremer set up the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to oversee reconstruction and the transition to democratic rule. CPA absorbed ORHA, and Jay Garner, who disagreed with Bremer on key issues, soon found himself out of a job. Just one week after being formally appointed by the president and before he could possibly have become thoroughly familiar with the situation on the ground, Bremer took the first of two fateful and in retrospect ill-advised decisions. On May 16, he signed CPA Order Number 1: De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society. The Order quite reasonably disbanded the Ba'ath Party and barred top officials from future government employment. Unfortunately, it went much further, decreeing that "persons determined to be full members of the Ba'ath Party shall be removed from their employment."[9]

Whether he acted alone or on orders from Washington, Bremer's sweeping dismissal was both unjust and unwise. It overlooked a basic fact of life in dictatorships: most people join the party because they have no choice. In Iraq as in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, civil servants and most professionals had to be party members. Most joined to keep their jobs—not out of ideological conviction. Even had they been regime supporters, dismissing so many people with the skills necessary to run Iraq made no sense. Garner had advocated "gentle de-Ba'athification," removing only the top layer of party officials. "Hell," he had warned Bremer two days before the order went out, "you won't be able to run anything if you go this deep." Garner estimated that the Order drove 30,000–50,000 of Iraq's educated elite from all walks of life onto the street and, quite possibly, into the arms of the insurgents.[10]

A week later Bremer followed de-Ba'athification with another sweeping edict. CPA Order Number 2 dissolved the Iraqi armed forces.[11] This decision put another 300,000 men out of work with no compensation. All had military training and many still had weapons.[12] Like its predecessor, this order could be challenged for its unfairness and imprudence. Although some Iraqi units surrendered intact, many regular army officers and men went home believing promises that the Americans would take care of them if they did not fight. They had good reason to be angry at the order, which had disastrous security consequences. During the first battle for Fallujah, one Iraqi sheik commented on the consequences of the decision, "You told five hundred thousand men who trained to kill people and break things to go become productive members in a society

that had 70-plus percent unemployment," he observed, "And I'd say they're being pretty productive right now."[13]

In his memoir, *My Year in Iraq*, Bremer staunchly defends his decision to disband the army, arguing that since it had already disintegrated, disbanding it was merely a formality. Keeping Saddam's forces in being or reconstituting them, he added, would have been unacceptable to the Shi'a and Kurds.[14] Considerable indirect evidence and the testimony of many people in Iraq at the time strongly challenges Bremer's conclusion. Units had certainly disintegrated, but the CPA might still have recalled individual officers and men, as coalition forces eventually did. The current Iraqi army contains many soldiers from Saddam's forces.[15] CENTCOM had actively encouraged Iraqis to quit the fight but expected to recall them within two weeks.[16] Furthermore, virtually all American generals on the ground opposed the decision. Many officers did not even hear of it until after the CPA released Order Number 2. Even if the United States could not use Iraqi soldiers, it might at least have paid them and in so doing ameliorated much of their anger. Estimates put the cost of paying the army one year's wage at $200 million, an amount that pales when compared to the roughly $4.9 billion a month spent on COIN and reconstruction.[17] In April 2004, the administration announced that it would employ some of the soldiers dismissed by Bremer, a tacit admission that their dismissal had been a mistake.

The de-Ba'athification and dissolution orders had immediate and noticeable effects on the street. U.S. officers reported a significant increase in attacks against them in the immediate aftermath of the decision to de-Ba'athify Iraq. Officials with whom they had been working, including mayors of some towns, expressed considerable anger at the decision. Besides undermining security, the orders seriously hampered reconstruction by removing trained administrators, civil servants, and technical experts from key posts. In some communities, projects made possible by working with local officials came to a grinding halt. One U.S. Civil Affairs officer complained bitterly but to no avail about the order to let all the local people go. "We're accomplishing things," he protested, "and if you stop it, everything goes back to a minus."[18] Another officer devised a plan to pay local Iraqis $40 a week to remove garbage and raw sewage running through the streets. The CPA refused to fund the project, saying it had its own plan for handling the problem, and the streets remained filthy for much longer than they would have.[19]

De-Ba'athification and disbanding the security forces made a bad situation much worse. The orders deprived the coalition of civil servants who could run the country and troops who might have helped to maintain order. General John Abizaid, Commander of U.S. CENTCOM after Franks retired, General David McKiernan, CLF Commander during the invasion

of Iraq, and Jay Garner, Bremer's predecessor, all opposed the dissolution order, maintained that Iraqi soldiers could have been recalled to duty, and argued vehemently for reconstituting elements of the army.[20] To Iraqi soldiers who had heeded the call of U.S. commanders not to resist the invasion, this action seemed especially unjust.[21] Some of these disillusioned men swelled the ranks of the insurgents or the various sectarian militias that sprang up throughout Iraq. The two orders contradicted wisdom gained in occupying Japan and Germany after World War II. The allies removed top Nazi officials but left the police force, civil service, and even some army units intact. Former *Wehrmacht* (army of the Third Reich) officers rebuilt the *Bundeswehr* (West German Army) in the 1950s. The United States took a similar approach to governing Japan. German and Japanese citizens did not, of course, view police and other government employees with the same antipathy Iraqi Shi'a and Kurds felt toward Saddam's security forces. Even so, recalled Iraqi soldiers could at least have helped maintain order in the Sunni triangle. These troops spoke Arabic and knew the local people. The CPA could not easily replace them.

The shortage of troops caused by Rumsfeld's parsimonious planning and exacerbated by Bremer's precipitous decisions contributed more than any other factor to the deteriorating security situation. COIN requires large contingents of foot soldiers. Numbers cannot be augmented by technology as readily as they can in conventional war. A harsh arithmetic correlates with success or failure in most internal security operations. The British deployed approximately 20 members of the security forces (police and military) per 1,000 inhabitants to defeat insurgents in Malaya and Northern Ireland. NATO deployed roughly the same ratio of troops to inhabitants in Kosovo and Bosnia. However, the United States and its allies deployed only 4.6 troops per 1,000 in Somalia, a mission that ultimately failed. Coalition forces in Iraq have averaged approximately 7 per 1,000.[22] Applying the 20 per 1,000 ratio in Iraq would have required the sustained presence of over 500,000 troops, roughly the number called for in Zinni's OPLAN 1003-98. Critics have maintained that the United States could not have sustained this troop level and that doing so might not have produced victory anyway.[23] Accepting that argument, however, underscores the error in not securing the support of more allies before the invasion and of not reconstituting at least some Iraqi security forces afterwards. The coalition could also have applied the troop ratio only to those areas most threatened with unrest. A larger force might even have prevented the insurgency from starting in the first place. The troop shortage forced the Army and Marine Corps to take a fire-brigade approach to violence during the first year of the insurgency. They could clear but not hold areas to which insurgents returned as soon as the Americans left.

The insurgents either moved to quieter areas or went underground, resurfacing after U.S. soldiers moved on.

The troop shortage also reinforced the American tendency to overemphasize force protection, a tendency that further undermined COIN efforts. As the situation deteriorated, GIs increasingly lived in fortified camps or outposts, sallying forth only in armored vehicles or on heavily armed foot patrols. They had learned in Vietnam to keep the general population at a distance. Viet Cong hung close to U.S. troops, forcing the Americans to reduce use of air and artillery support to prevent friendly-fire casualties. An overemphasis on force protection, however, puts physical and psychological distance between soldiers and the population whose trust they are trying to win. Soldiers in flak jackets, helmets, and goggles driving around in armored Humvees with heavy machine guns reinforce the popular image of them as foreign occupiers.

## SCOPE AND NATURE OF IRAQI RESISTANCE

By the summer of 2003, even administration stalwarts and Pentagon ideologues could no longer dismiss the insurgency raging in Iraq as the work of regime holdouts. The delay in acknowledging the scope and nature of the violence made combating it much more difficult. An insurgency, like a fire, can more easily be put out in its early stages than it can once it has spread. This insurgency would prove more complex and intractable than any that had preceded it. Understanding its nature took time, and developing a strategy to combat it took even longer.

To begin with, the United States had great difficulty understanding its adversaries. Poor intelligence, the complexity of the violence, and its continuing evolution made it very hard to identify the various opposition groups engaged in battling the coalition and one another. One observer dubbed the conflict "a compound insurgency" in recognition of the multiple organizations and movements united around the common goal of expelling the Americans.[24] The enemy was a hydra with numerous heads and no single center of gravity. The coalition faced a complex and ever-changing mixture of insurgency, imported terrorism, ethnic conflict, and criminality. Each threat came from multiple sources. The perpetrators sometimes cooperated, often worked in parallel, and not infrequently fought each other.

During the first year of the occupation, the most serious security threat came from a Sunni Arab insurgency supported by foreign terrorists, although serious fighting between the coalition and the radical Shi'a cleric Muktada al-Sadr also occurred. The Sunni insurgents (initially at least) represented a variety of groups and interests within three broad categories: the secularists, the tribes, and the Islamists.[25] The secularists consisted

primarily of former Ba'athist regime members and their supporters, many of whom may have had little love for Saddam Hussein, but who, nonetheless, resented the loss of lucrative jobs and worried about their place in a Shi'a dominated Iraq. Bremer removed some 30,000 former Ba'athists from important positions and/or forbade them from entering public service. Each office-holder controlled patronage networks of family members and clients who benefited from these sinecures, increasing several fold the size of the disgruntled population. Those dismissed from the armed forces possessed military training and often weapons.[26] The Saddam Fedayeen provided the core of the insurgency around which these other elements gathered.

Tribal loyalties have further complicated the Iraqi conflict. Although the word "tribe" has become politically incorrect in academic circles, in Iraq it aptly describes networks of people interrelated through kinship and patronage-client relationships. Some tribes resent not only loss of government jobs but also the lucrative smuggling trade the United States interrupted in its efforts to secure Iraq's borders against terrorist infiltrators.[27] Tribal norms make an offense against one family member an attack upon all, particularly if the aggrieved party is a tribal leader. The repercussions of slights, real and imagined, have an enormous ripple effect through time and space.

Religion has played a role in the conflict as well. "Islamism," a broad reform movement committed to returning Islam to its roots, calls for the removal of the secular, "apostate," regimes that govern many Muslim countries. Islamists would also rid their world of immorality, most clearly manifest in a Western culture that seems to condone promiscuity, drugs, and alcohol. They would return the Muslim world to their vision of the *uma* (community of believers) of the seventh century, the time of the Prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors. Although Islamism is not inherently violent, its more extreme practitioners do advocate violence against infidels and apostates, non-Muslims and Muslims not strictly following the teachings of the *Quran*. Foreigners occupying Muslim lands and Muslims who cooperate with them have been primary targets of Islamist terror.

Iraqi Islamists can be divided into moderates and radicals. Moderates found in Iraq's Mosques one of the few havens from Saddam Hussein's regime. Renewed faith in Islam provided what pan-Arabism and the Ba'ath Party could not, a sense of purpose and direction in a hostile world. While moderates fought the American-led occupation, they had little interest in conducting a global jihad. Although they feared Shi'a domination, they did not oppose Shi'a Islam per se. Radical Sunni Islamists, on the other hand, considered Shi'as idol worshipers and perpetrated the brutal murder of Shi'a pilgrims journeying to the Holy City of Karbala

in March 2004. Radicals of various theological persuasions cooperated with other insurgents to drive the Americans from Iraq but remained committed to global *jihad*. While moderates may be enticed to give up the struggle, so long as the government respects their religious sensibilities and meets their needs, radicals refuse to compromise.[28]

## FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Native Iraqi insurgents received support, training, weapons, and funding from mujahedeen. These "holy warriors" flocked to Iraq to fight the American invaders just as their predecessors had flocked to Afghanistan in the 1980s to expel the Soviets. Thanks to the small size of the coalition force (relative to terrain and population) and the country's long, porous borders, these foreign fighters had little difficulty getting into Iraq. Although not a haven for international terrorists before the invasion, Iraq had certainly become one since.

Finding mujahedeen to fight and die for the Iraqi cause has proven very easy. Until the July 2006 Israeli incursion, southern Lebanon in particular provided a fertile ground for recruitment. Hezbollah recruited young zealots, provided them with false passports at the cost of $1,000 each, and sent them to Damascus from whence they infiltrated into Iraq. The recruits received $800 a month, three times the salary of an Iraqi policeman.[29] These recruits provided many of the suicide bombers the insurgents used with deadly effect. Mujahedeen would consider Christian occupation of any Muslim country illegitimate, but the manner in which the United States entered Iraq (without a UN mandate) made their cause more legitimate among many people in the region who might not otherwise have supported them. Jordanian Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi founded al-Qaeda of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers, popularly known as "al-Qaeda in Iraq," in 2003 and affiliated with al-Qaeda proper the following year. He led the organization until his death in June 2006.

Cooperation between radical Shi'a Hezbollah and radical Sunni insurgents in Iraq, groups with seemingly antithetical worldviews, illustrates the depth of anger toward the United States in the Muslim world. Such cooperation, once deemed impossible, has been occurring for quite some time. Considerable evidence suggests that Lebanese Hezbollah cooperated with al-Qaeda to conduct the 1995 attack on the U.S. military barracks in the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. The Shi'a group also cooperates with Sunni Hamas in the struggle against Israel.[30]

In 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq announced its union with five other groups in Iraq to form the Mujahedeen Shura Council dedicated to "the establishment of an Islamic state in which the word of Allah will reign supreme."[31] This broad goal identifies Mujahedeen Shura as international terrorists

committed to a broad ideological agenda rather than insurgents seeking power in Iraq itself. How closely the Council cooperates and coordinates with insurgent groups remains unclear. At the beginning of the conflict, the goals of foreign terrorists and domestic insurgents coincided. Both sought to kill Americans and their coalition partners and drive them from Iraq. Over time, however, their goals appear to have diverged. Sunni insurgents and Shi'a militias want power in Iraq. They have little immediate interest in a world Islamist revolution, especially the Shi'a whom Osama bin Laden despises. The evolving nature of the relationship between al-Qaeda in Iraq and nationalist insurgents may be seen in al-Zarqawi's two most infamous attacks: the August 2003 bombing of the UN building in Baghdad and the February 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samara. The first attack furthered insurgent goals of expelling the foreigners, the second merely fomented ethnic conflict.

## STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE INSURGENCY

The precise structure of insurgent organizations remains unclear, although all seem to have adopted some version of the hub-and-spoke system, a decentralized group of semi-autonomous cells linked to a hub (higher command). Typically, only one cell members has any contact with the larger insurgent organization and even then perhaps only anonymously, reducing the likelihood that capturing him or the other cell members will endanger the organization as a whole. The hubs of several groups can be linked to a central hub, creating a vast, highly flexible clandestine insurgent network. The central hub can direct cells for specific operations or order them to strike whenever and wherever opportunity permits. Cells may have a specialist function (explosives, support, etc.), and expertise, personnel, and resources can be moved throughout the network.

Saddam laid the groundwork for the insurgency by creating paramilitary groups in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Documents captured during the invasion reveal the extent and capability of these groups.[32] The 1991 uprisings in both the Shi'a south and the Kurdish north revealed to Saddam inadequacies in his state security apparatus. To tighten his grip on hostile areas, he created the Saddam Fedayeen, a paramilitary force from Ba'ath Party members fanatically loyal to him. The exact number of Fedayeen remains unknown, but 7,200 men passed through the organization's training camps during their first year of operation.[33] This training "focused on small arms, small-unit tactics, sabotage techniques, and military surveillance and reconnaissance tasks"—just the skills needed for an insurgency.[34] Some Fedayeen also received specialized training in explosives, including how to make and deploy booby traps. Saddam

equipped his henchmen with excellent equipment. From their creation to the fall of Saddam, the Fedayeen engaged in enforcement terror on behalf of the regime in the Shi'a south and launched clandestine operations in the Kurdish north, nominally independent and under U.S. protection. As the invasion of Iraq loomed, Saddam turned to his loyal paramilitaries both to keep suspect areas under regime control and to fight the invaders. Thousands died in suicidal attacks against American armored columns, but countless others survived with their training and weapons to participate in the growing insurgency. Another paramilitary group, the al-Quds Army, received less training and poorer equipment. It lacked the commitment of the Fedayeen and performed even less effectively during the invasion, although some of its members may also be among the insurgents.

## INSURGENT STRENGTH

Determining the number of insurgent fighters at any given time is nearly impossible and, in any case, provides little real indication of the strength of the insurgency. Estimates on Iraqi insurgent strength have varied widely and been revised upward on several occasions. Initial estimates put their number at 5,000; subsequent assessments raised that total to 20,000.[35] The insurgency has increased in strength since it began in mid-2003. Insurgents usually deploy what they consider an optimal number of fighters for a given environment at a particular phase of the conflict. This number represents a fraction of their real combat strength. The degree of tacit acceptance and active support the insurgents enjoy among the general population reveals much more about the strength of the movement than does the number of fighters deployed at any given time. Fewer than 500 active IRA members tied down as many as twelve British infantry battalions and a large police force in a Northern Ireland conflict lasting more than 30 years. While they could never have defeated the security forces, they might have persisted indefinitely.[36] With the active support of a considerable segment of the Catholic population and acquiescence of the rest, they had an almost inexhaustible supply of recruits to replace those killed, wounded, or captured by the security forces. COIN must focus, therefore, not on killing insurgents, but on eroding their base of support.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The diverse insurgent and terrorist groups share a core objective but have radically different visions of what achieving this objective will accomplish. They all want the U.S.-led coalition out of Iraq and

understand that inflicting casualties on the Americans is the best way to achieve this result. Sunni nationalists resent loss of their privileged position under Saddam Hussein. Although they would prefer restoration of that status, they want to insure the best position for themselves in the new Iraq. As secularists they do not want to live in a state governed by *Sharia* and fear any government dominated by the country's Shi'a majority. Sunni Islamists want a state governed by *Sharia*, an arrangement opposed by Kurds as well as secular Sunnis. Shi'a militias favor an Islamic state but one conforming to the beliefs and practices of their sect. They do not, however, follow a single leader. Foreign mujahedeen affiliated with al-Qaeda in Iraq see the Iraq war as a means to further their broader ideological goal of creating a worldwide uma under strict Islamist rule. Short of directly controlling Iraq, they content themselves with keeping it in turmoil. Because ousting the coalition served their common interest, the diverse groups initially cooperated. Over time their disparate goals have become a source of conflict that the United States has exploited. However, lack of a coherent COIN strategy prevented the coalition from splitting the various factions early in the campaign.

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

During the first year of the occupation at least, the various insurgent groups had a clear immediate goal and a simple, effective strategy for achieving it. They correctly identified American public opinion as the coalition's center of gravity. Although they could never defeat U.S. forces, they did not need to do so. By bogging down U.S. forces in a costly protracted war, they might convince American voters that no reasonable gain was worth the cost in blood and treasure of remaining in Iraq. The insurgents could thus win if they could force American withdrawal before the new Iraqi security forces became strong enough to maintain order. At the same time, they could infiltrate and subvert these forces, keeping them loyal to a particular insurgent group or ethnic faction rather than to the central government. To accomplish their goals the insurgents need only persist in their struggle. Evidence suggests that the strategy has worked, at least to some extent. A protest vote over the war gave the Democrats control of both houses of Congress in the 2006 midterm election, and Iraq has remained an issue in the 2008 presidential elections. By most accounts, the loyalty of Iraqi police and military units to the central government remains questionable.

To achieve this strategic objective the insurgents have developed a variety of small-unit tactics and refined them over time. From the end of hostilities through mid-July 2003, they relied predominantly on ambushes using small arms and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs).

From then on IEDs became their weapon of choice. They placed IEDs along known convoy or patrol routes. The tactic served two purposes: kill as many Americans as possible to erode domestic support for the war and provoke U.S. forces into overreacting to attacks. The insurgents intentionally operated within populated areas, knowing that Iraqis would blame the Americans for the inevitable civilian deaths and injuries resulting from return fire. Conventionally trained forces responded to sniping by returning a high volume of fire at the gunmen. One officer commented on the negative effects of this approach: "It's kind of a shame, because it means we've killed a lot of innocent people."[37]

During the summer of 2003, the insurgents expanded their target list. In addition to U.S. military personnel, they attacked embassies, foreign contractors, journalists, international organizations, and ordinary Iraqis who collaborated with the occupiers. On August 7, a truck bomb blew up outside the Jordanian embassy, killing 17 and wounding 40. Insurgents also made increasing use of "the poor man's cruise missile," the suicide bomber. One devastating suicide attack on the UN mission building in Baghdad in August killed 22 people, including Chief of Mission Sergio Vieira de Mello and several of his staff, causing the United Nations to pull out of Iraq, just as the insurgents had hoped. On October 9, a suicide bomber in Sadr City launched the first insurgent attack on a police post. The emerging security forces would continue to be high-profile targets. The insurgents also captured and beheaded American contract workers in front of television cameras. Iraqi employees of foreign companies and their families received threats warning them to resign their positions or face death.

Insurgents' tactics supported their strategic goal, but they also carried a certain risk. By attacking coalition troops, emerging Iraqi security forces, government employees, and foreign contractors, they hoped to make Iraq ungovernable, delay rebuilding of critical infrastructure, and prevent the emergence of democratic government. They counted quite reasonably on ordinary Iraqis blaming the Americans for the abysmal living conditions into which they had sunk. However, to succeed in forcing the United States out, the insurgents would have to deny their own people a better life. Over time, these people might refocus their anger on the insurgents, especially as Iraqis themselves bore the brunt of increasing violence. For such a shift in attitude to occur, however, the United States would have to devise a comprehensive COIN plan, show clear progress in rebuilding and development, and demonstrate an unshakable resolve to see the campaign through to a conclusion, no matter how long it took. None of these vital conditions existed during the first year of the occupation; all three have yet to be realized.

Americans have remained the focus of Iraqi anger in large measure because of how they have handled the insurgency, especially during its first crucial year.

## CONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO UNCONVENTIONAL WAR

Lacking a COIN strategy and the requisite number of troops to implement one should it be devised, U.S. forces often responded to the crisis out of their default mode: conventional war fighting. Like any group of professionals faced with an unfamiliar task, they tried to apply the skills they had honed to precision. Those skills consisted of the application of technology and firepower in joint operations conducted in a complex conventional battle space. Commanders did make considerable effort to avoid overreliance on firepower, especially close air support. Forward air controllers tried to deliver bombs and missiles with pinpoint accuracy. Nonetheless, serious mistakes occurred, such as a missile aimed at a house supposedly occupied by insurgents that killed a prominent tribal leader, alienating many of his followers. U.S. infantry tactics caused the most problems. Soldiers tended to respond even to individual sniper rounds with a fusillade of small arms fire and automatic weapons. "If anyone gets too close to us, we fucking waste them," one lieutenant commented.[38] Most officers would have described this approach as "reconnaissance by fire," returning a concentrated volume of fire to pin down, root out, and ultimately destroy the insurgents. By whatever name, the tactic amounted to the same thing: too many bullets fired indiscriminately into inhabited areas causing unnecessary civilian casualties. The insurgents repeatedly exploited this tendency by firing at Americans from the homes of innocent civilians, baiting the GIs into overreacting. "The residents of the targeted neighborhoods understand the insurgents' trick," observed one reporter, "but it is the Americans they blame...for drawing the insurgents' fire in the first place."[39] Because insurgents used cell phones to detonate IEDs, soldiers got into the habit of shooting anyone using one under circumstances they considered even remotely suspicious. They often tossed grenades into houses to clear them, and sometimes shot anyone coming to collect the body of a slain insurgent.[40]

In addition to causing unnecessary casualties, soldiers created ill will through heavy handedness and cultural insensitivity. In one incident a U.S. convoy driving up the wrong side of an Iraqi main street, horns blaring, encountered an Iraqi taxi driver. A soldier pointed an assault rifle at the terrified man and screamed, "Back this bitch up, motherfucker!"[41] As one correspondent aptly described the situation:

> We have broken down their doors, run them off the roads, swiveled our guns at them, shouted profanities at them, and disrespected their women—all this

> hundreds or thousands of times every day. We have dishonored them publicly, and within a society that places public honor above life itself. These are the roots of the fight we are in.[42]

Arab journalists corroborated the observations of Westerners: "When the average Iraqi sees American soldiers violating basic Iraqi values and norms of behavior on a daily basis, it creates a lot of resentment."[43] The majority of soldiers exercised admirable restraint under difficult circumstances and often in the face of severe provocation. Those who did not, however, created a lasting impression hard to counter, especially when heavy-handed tactics combined with inability to deliver vital goods and services made the Americans rather than the insurgents the enemy of many Iraqis.

Private security firms often showed even less restraint than the military.[44] Given the shortage of troops and the deteriorating situation, contractors took to hiring their own guards and escorts from a host of companies such as Blackwater. Some 60,000 of these hired guns entered the country, answerable to no one but those who hired them. They fell neither under the Uniform Code of Military justice governing the behavior of American soldiers nor under ordinary criminal and civil law. These guards ranged from the highly competent to rogue mercenaries with criminal backgrounds. "The [security] contractor was hired to protect the principal. He had no stake in pacifying the country," observed one Marine colonel. "Therefore, they [*sic*] ran Iraqis off the roads, reconned by fire, and generally treated the locals as expendable." Despite their destructive independence, Iraqis believed that the U.S. military controlled private security firms and so blamed them for the conduct of the contractors.[45]

CLF Command under General Ricardo Sanchez, who took over from David McKiernan in April, inadvertently (or perhaps tacitly) encouraged an overreliance on firepower in their approach to the insurgency. They assigned units to areas far too large for them to control and basically told them to hunt bad guys. "Dividing up the 'land pie' and telling the troops to 'go at it' is not a coherent strategy," concluded one officer and COIN expert. "Unfortunately that is what I observed when I was in country." This approach guaranteed an uneven, largely incoherent response to the threat. Some battalion and even divisional commanders made a concerted effort to exercise restraint and to win the hearts and minds of local Iraqis. Others saw body count as the best measure of effectiveness. They put a premium on killing and capturing insurgents. Given the dearth of intelligence and the shortage of translators, many innocent people died in the resulting search-and-destroy missions. In these units, soldiers who disagreed with the ham-fisted approach had a very difficult time. During one operation, a young officer

known for taking prisoners returned to find a teddy bear on his bunk, placed there by his colleagues as an insult for being too soft on the insurgents.

In most cases, however, the killing of innocent civilians resulted not from malicious intent but from the inevitable frustration of overextended soldiers who lacked the training, language skills, or cultural understanding to conduct COIN operations in Iraq. After executing a highly effective conventional operation that got them to Baghdad in record time, the soldiers had been repeatedly told that they would soon be going home. Instead, they found their tours extended in a rapidly deteriorating security environment without adequate numbers, equipment, or guidance. Failure to plan for a prolonged deployment coupled with the collapse of Iraqi infrastructure deprived them of adequate base facilities. Many endured 100 plus degree temperatures without air conditioning or running water for showers. An insufficient number of Kevlar flak jackets and armored Humvees left them vulnerable to attack from insurgents hiding in a population that had gone from welcoming through sullen to hostile. Add to these factors the American cultural predilection for confrontation as an early response to most challenges and the likelihood of deaths caused by excessive force became a certainty. Individual soldiers bear responsibility for their actions, but the real failures were systemic and structural.

Much the same can be said about the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, although in that infamous case individual culpability ranged from neglect to criminality. Under considerable pressure to get information, guards were given a dangerous latitude in "softening up" prisoners for interrogation. Neither the certain knowledge that very few Americans engaged in such behavior nor the punishment meted out to those who did could offset the adverse publicity caused by photographs of smiling GIs abusing prisoners.

## LOSING HEARTS AND MINDS

Use of excessive force and cultural insensitivity exacerbated the insurgency but did not cause it. A small percentage of Iraqis actively supported the insurgents, a larger group tacitly supported them, and many more acquiesced to their presence, concerned only with the day-to-day struggle to survive. The real problem was that few people trusted the CPA, which many said stood for "can't provide anything." While those Iraqis who actively supported the insurgents probably did so for ideological reasons, frustration and bitterness over the general climate of insecurity and their poor quality of life motivated those who tacitly supported or at least tolerated them. Sunnis in particular have experienced a significant change of

fortune. Hardship inevitably follows war and the overthrow of a regime, but absence of a COIN strategy and lack of sufficient troops to carry it out made the situation in post-Saddam Iraq much worse than it needed to be. Failure to preserve law and order followed by the inability to wage a concerted hearts-and-minds campaign fueled hostility toward Americans. Although the Rumsfeld Pentagon bears primary responsibility for this failure, the remark of one senior officer suggests that the military shares at least some of the blame: "[I] don't think we will put much energy into trying the old saying, 'win the hearts and minds.' I don't look at it as one of the metrics of success."[46] In absence of a strategy, body count became the only "metric of success," even though it exacerbated the situation.

Unemployment skyrocketed after the invasion, reaching 67 percent, due in no small measure to U.S. policy.[47] In addition to dismissing nearly 350,000 people because of their connection to the previous regime, Bremer let go another 150,000 government employees as an austerity measure.[48] Reconstruction efforts could not come close to absorbing the unemployed. Lucrative (often no-bid) contracts went almost exclusively to American companies while Iraqi firms received little of the reconstruction capital flowing into their country.[49] American firms and the U.S. military did hire some locals, but Iraqis who worked for them risked death for themselves and members of their families because coalition forces could not protect them from the insurgents. The U.S. policy on issuing contracts created further problems because it precluded Russian firms familiar with Iraq's Soviet-era energy grid from participating in the reconstruction effort.[50]

Such rules and restrictions compounded but did not create the basic problem caused by insufficient planning for the postwar phase of operations, which the administration had denied would even be necessary. As a result, projects took longer to initiate and implement. They also occurred haphazardly rather than according to a coherent strategy linked to the security effort. Once money began to flow into Iraq it overwhelmed the oversight capacity of the CPA, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars to graft, corruption, and outright theft. Waste and inefficiency magnified the squandering of one of the most vital resources in a COIN campaign—time.

Only in the area of political development did the CPA make discernable progress, although the process had little positive effect on the security situation. As any manager knows, metrics drive behavior. Workers will produce whatever management dictates as a measure of their effectiveness, even if the measure has little to do with real success. In this respect, the CPA was no different from any other organization. The administration had defined success in terms of political benchmarks

leading to a democratically elected government. Bremer dutifully complied, appointing an Iraqi Interim Governing Council in June 2003 and an Interim Government the following year. The Interim Government prepared for national elections to a Constitutional Assembly in January 2005. A national referendum would approve the constitution, and parliamentary elections would follow. Government is not, however, *governance.* None of these political bodies exercised real sovereignty over the country or delivered vital goods and services, and most lacked legitimacy in the eyes of at least one of the major ethno-religious groups. The Sunnis boycotted elections to the Constitutional Assembly, which the Shi'a dominated. This outcome deepened Sunni fears and strengthened the insurgency. Realizing their mistake, Sunni Iraqis voted in the national elections, but demographics guaranteed a Shi'a majority, which the Sunni continue to distrust. The Kurds, of course, trust neither group. Iraq has had elections aplenty, but it lacks real democracy and a viable government capable of ruling in more than name.

## THE 6000-MILE SCREWDRIVER

In addition to the absence of a coherent hearts-and-minds strategy, the U.S. COIN campaign also suffered from the perennial problem of micromanagement. Real-time reporting of events invited interference to a degree not possible in previous wars. While American forces can be quite flexible in conventional operations, the uncertainties of unconventional conflict combined with political aversion to casualties encourages an American cultural tendency for those in the upper ranks to provide precise instructions to their subordinates.[51] Because insurgent guerrillas and terrorists operate in small units as part of a flat organization, those who oppose them must operate in correspondingly small units to be effective. These units, usually led by a lieutenant or senior NCO, must be free to take initiative based on sound judgment and according to a broad strategy without constantly asking up the chain of command for instructions.

Ironically, Paul Bremer seems to have coined the term "6000-mile screwdriver" as a complaint against interference from Washington. Nonetheless, he himself proved to be one of the worst micromanagers of the war. He made decisions affecting military operations without consulting soldiers and often disregarded their advice when he did. Under his leadership, the CPA adopted a rigid, top-down approach to reconstruction and political development. Directives and contracts flowed out of Baghdad's Green Zone, derisively referred to as "Oz" by soldiers who considered it out of touch with the day to day realities of Iraq.

The tendency to adopt rigid, hierarchical management systems is a deep-rooted American trait by no means unique to the military. However, the U.S. military's commitment to a firepower maneuver-warfare conventional army coupled with its historical experience probably exaggerated this tendency, at least during the first year of the insurgency. The sheer complexity of a modern high-tech battlefield upon which over a hundred killing systems can be brought to bear requires significant coordination and considerable control from above. An advancing column of armor out of place by even a small distance risks friendly-fire casualties.[52] Useful as it may be in large-scaled conventional battles, however, such tight control of operational units does not work well in COIN.

## FALLUJAH

No anecdote or example better illustrates the failures of the first year in Iraq and the causes that produced them than the protracted struggle for Fallujah. The town became a microcosm of the country, a poignant illustration of an occupation gone wrong and of soldiers struggling to make the best of a bad situation. Too few troops and inadequate resources produced a tentative, inconsistent response to pacifying the city. Units stayed long enough to get to know the locals and then left, replaced by a new group who started from scratch. Frustration and the perennial shortage of soldiers led to bad tactics: sweeps instead of clear-and-hold operations, overreliance on firepower rather than the controlled, focused use of force. Those soldiers who understood the slow, painstaking pace of COIN faced mounting pressure from far up the chain of command to crack down hard and produce results. Washington used the 6000-mile screwdriver on American forces in the city with disastrous consequences. As happened so often in Iraq, soldiers on the ground developed good tactics only to have them thrown away by bad strategy or lack of any strategy at all.

The town of 350,000 43 miles west of Baghdad lies in the heart of the Sunni triangle. Although it suffered little damage during the 2003 invasion, widespread looting in the immediate aftermath of the conventional war severely damaged its infrastructure. Diminished quality of life, high unemployment acerbated by CPA policies, and a high concentration of former Ba'ath party members and military officers fired by Bremer turned the city into a hotbed of insurgency. Known as "the city of mosques," Fallujah's houses of prayer provided a platform for radical imams to mobilize angry young men to join or at least support the insurgency. Mosques also provided safe havens, staging areas, supply depots, and even firing positions from which to attack U.S. soldiers reluctant to shoot at religious sites. On the positive side, however, the town had a mayor and a network of Sheikdoms with whom the CPA could work. To win and retain the

support of Fallujah's citizens, American forces needed resources to improve their quality of life and enough troops to secure the streets. They had neither.

From April 2003 to April 2004, responsibility for Fallujah fell first to the 82nd Airborne, then to the 3rd Infantry Division, to the 82nd once more, and finally to the Marine Expeditionary Force. These units in turn stationed five different battalions in the city during the first year of occupation. This fast-paced turnover (known in the military as "unit turbulence") violated a key principle of COIN. Ideally, military units should remain within an area for as long as possible, become intimately familiar with the terrain, and get to know the inhabitants. By building trust and developing a working relationship with local leaders, the troops might begin to gather the human intelligence necessary for them to disrupt local insurgent organizations and networks. Because the Bush administration expected to have most forces out of Iraq before the first troop rotation ended, it had no long-term plan for future deployments. The small size of the invasion force precluded stationing adequate forces in even the largest towns to cow resistance and quell unrest. Bremer's demobilization order eliminated the Iraqi troops who might have helped and sent many disgruntled Ba'athists back to their homes in Fallujah.

Reporters, academics, and some fellow officers have unfairly criticized the army units for their alleged mishandling of Fallujah prior to the Marine deployment. In the judgment of one observer, they were "ill suited to urban operations, didn't want to be there, and overreacted when they were provoked."[53] While it contains an element of truth, this glib assessment does justice neither to the complexity of Fallujah nor to the efforts the soldiers made to deal with its overwhelming challenges. To begin with, they faced the perennial problem of too few troops occupying too much territory. Elements of the 82nd entered the city in late April 2003, but had no plan to occupy it in force. The 3rd Infantry Division, which took over in May, initially deployed a 200-man company of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, which it later replaced with a brigade of 1,500 soldiers. When the 505th Parachute Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division replaced them in September, it had 4,400 men and women to cover 1,600 square miles of Anbar province, which included Fallujah.[54]

With so few troops, American commanders could hardly occupy even a fraction of the city. The soldiers had little if any training and no real experience of urban guerrilla warfare, one of the most challenging tasks for conventional troops. Their Abrams tanks could not operate in most urban areas and their Bradley fighting vehicles could move only on main streets. Even the versatile Humvees had a wheelbase too wide for most alleys and many side streets. In the rabbit warren of narrow streets and close-packed buildings, even poorly organized guerrillas with AK-47 rifles and RPGs

could do considerable damage to conventional forces. Fighting in such an environment, especially when women and children openly aided the insurgents who often fired from occupied houses, inevitably produced civilian casualties. Many of those killed were not, of course, innocent civilians, but the media seldom made that distinction when televising images of slain Iraqis.

All the elements for a major incident existed in Fallujah from the start, and it did not take long for one to materialize. On April 28, 2003, Saddam's birthday and five days after their arrival in the city, Marine detachments faced angry crowds of Iraqis protesting deployment of armed patrols throughout the city. Their choice of date suggests that many of the protestors were former Ba'ath Party members unhappy over their loss of status. They accused the Americans of many abuses, including using their night-vision goggles to spy on women. This accusation seems to have been a variant of the popular Iraqi myth that GI sun glasses could actually see through clothing. Two American units stood down the crowds without firing a shot. However, when demonstrators demanded that a platoon in an elementary school leave immediately, firing took place. The Americans maintained they had been shot at by Iraqis on nearby rooftops. The demonstrators insisted that no one fired on the Americans. Correspondent Bing West concluded that "the keyed up paratroopers unleashed a fusillade of automatic weapons fire...In the next several minutes fifteen men, women, and children were killed and dozens were wounded."[55] General Charles Swannack, Jr., commander of the 82nd Airborne, insisted that his troops had been shot at by a handful of instigators and "returned very accurate and precise fire killing/wounding these 5–6 instigators."[56] Al-Jazeera television aired a remarkably balanced account the following day, providing both versions of events and giving no casualty figures.[57] The Director of the Fallujah Hospital told a Human Rights Watch investigation team that 13 demonstrators had been killed and 75 wounded, four of whom later died.[58]

None of the casualty figures support charges of uncontrolled, indiscriminate firing, but the ballistics analysis conducted by Human Rights Watch just days after the attack belies the soldiers' claims that they came under concentrated fire. The small unit facing an angry mob at night (the incident occurred around 10:00 PM) probably did hear gunfire, which may have been aimed at them but could just as easily have come from Iraqis discharging weapons into the air (a common practice during demonstrations). In the ensuing confusion, the unit had valid reasons for believing that their lives were in danger and returned fire. Under such confused circumstances, it is hard to imagine the frightened soldiers fired carefully aimed shots at specific perpetrators as Swannack later claimed. Firing was neither wild and indiscriminate nor carefully controlled.

The real military failure was strategic not tactical. Commanders put a small unit, a platoon of no more than 30 men with no experience of urban insurgency, in a volatile situation with little guidance and no immediate backup. A confrontation of this sort was inevitable.

The April 28 incident deepened hostility toward the United States in Fallujah and throughout Iraq and shaped future operations in the city. The 3rd Infantry Division, which took over from the 82nd in May, had to balance advice from local politicians that if Americans stayed out of the city, no further violence would occur, with a valid concern that left unchecked the insurgency would grow stronger. Like its predecessor, the 3rd lacked sufficient troops to occupy the city in any meaningful sense. They opted for a "carrot-and-stick" strategy, pumping money into the city while conducting a series of raids to capture insurgents and weapons stocks. The strategy encountered two problems. While raids did yield some good results, they also alienated people. Faulty intelligence invariably led to raids on the houses of innocent people. The soldiers compensated the families of those killed or wounded on April 28 and funded some worthwhile projects, but the $150,000 per week they distributed amounted to a mere fraction of the estimated $150 million the city and its 70,000 unemployed needed to operate.[59] The 3rd did, however, avoid any major incident. During the summer and fall Fallujah simmered but it did not explode.

The MEF that took over from the 3rd Infantry Division in March 2004 concluded that, while the Army's approach contained the insurgency, it did not diminish it. The Marines determined to do better. They would apply sound COIN principles garnered from their own *Small Wars Manual* of 1940 and their experience with the combined action platoons in Vietnam. Despite good intentions, however, the perennial shortage of troops hindered Marine COIN operations as well. Like its predecessor, the MEF had to cover the 1,600 square miles of troublesome Anbar province, which included, in addition to Fallujah, the Sunni stronghold of Ramadi and the Syrian border across which supplies and insurgents moved. The Marines lacked the number of troops necessary to clear and hold city neighborhoods. Although they placed great hope in the newly trained Iraqi army, national guard, and police, their hope would be sorely disappointed.

In any case, events rapidly overtook planning. The 82nd formally handed over to the MEF on March 24, and the insurgents promptly tested the resolve of the new unit with a series of probing attacks and skirmishes, which the Marines handled with ease and restraint despite losing five men. On the 31st four employees of the Blackwater security company entered Fallujah unescorted and fell quickly into an ambush. The insurgents killed and dismembered them and burned their bodies,

hanging charred and dismembered torsos from a bridge. The Marines recognized the gruesome murders as an insurgent ploy to bait them into overreacting. They refused to comply. General James Mattis wanted to proceed cautiously, implementing a plan to retake Fallujah he and his staff had been preparing for months.[60] Television footage even allowed them to identify key perpetrators of the attack. Headquarters in Baghdad backed this deliberate approach. "We are not going to do a pell-mell rush into the city," Deputy Director of Operations General Mark Kermitt told the media. "It's going to be deliberate, it will be precise and it will be overwhelming." The MEF would not be thrown off its operational timetable by the insurgents. "We will be back in Fallujah," Kermitt declared. "It will be at a time and place of our choosing. We will hunt down the criminals. We will kill or capture them, and we will pacify Fallujah."[61]

The White House felt otherwise. The attack on the contractors infuriated the president, who believed that it had to be met with immediate and decisive force to maintain American credibility.[62] The *New York Times* made an unflattering comparison between the grisly murders and a similar incident in Somalia in which cheering crowds dragged the bodies of American soldiers through the streets before television cameras, prompting American withdrawal a few months later. "Memories of Mogadishu echoed across the country," the editorial proclaimed.[63] The president did not wish to repeat the humiliating incident. "I want heads to roll," Bush proclaimed.[64] Mattis received the order to "go in and clobber people." "This is what the enemy wants," he complained. He had no choice but to comply, knowing that precipitous action could make the insurgency worse. The administration had decided that strategic considerations required a firm, rapid response but did not adequately define those reasons or consider the potential adverse effects of military action in Iraq and throughout the region.[65]

On April 4, the MEF launched Operation Vigilant Resolve. A force of 2,000 Marines surrounded Fallujah and pushed combat teams into the city. In a series of intense firefights they moved into insurgent areas, destroying safe houses, killing and capturing insurgents, and taking significant casualties themselves. They faced perhaps 500 hard-core fighters (local Ba'athists and foreign mujahedeen) supported by another 1,000 part-timers. Countless young men pumped up by imams and believing they could drive out the infidels grabbed AK-47s and joined in the melee. The professional insurgents conducted carefully laid ambushes and effective hit-and-run operations. The amateurs rushed American positions yelling "Allah Akbar" (God is great) only to be cut down by accurate Marine fire. The insurgents and ordinary citizens had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of rifle ammunition and a large number of RPGs. The sheer volume of fire guaranteed that at least some rounds found their

mark. Despite these challenges, the Marines had the insurgents on the ropes a few days into the operation.[66]

As the Marines were winning the battle on the streets of Fallujah, the bureaucrats and politicians were losing it in Baghdad and Washington. The American assault unleashed a storm of protest in the Arab world. Iraqi members of the Interim Governing Council threatened to resign in protest over what they deemed unprovoked U.S. aggression. Adnan Pachachi, a Sunni member of the Council, told Dubai-based al-Arabiya Television, "We consider the action carried out by US forces as illegal and totally unacceptable."[67] The Arab League called for UN intervention to stop the fighting. "Iraq needs a radical solution which could help it recover its sovereignty, end the foreign occupation and allow the United Nations to play the main role in administering Iraq," declared League spokesman Hossam Zaki.[68] Fliers distributed throughout Baghdad called on Iraqis to donate food and blood. "Prevent the killing [of] the innocents in Fallujah by all means available, or your turn will come," one such handbill proclaimed.[69]

Fed a steady diet of atrocity stories and fired up by radical imams, both Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis took to the streets. The insurgents granted al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya reporters and camera crews ready access to hospitals and supplied them with atrocity stories, which the television stations accepted uncritically. Western networks, whose personnel dared not enter the city on pain of death, could not investigate the allegations directly but rebroadcast the images nonetheless. Caught off guard by the extent and intensity of negative publicity, neither the Pentagon nor the CPA made much effort to counter it. Civilians did, of course, die in Fallujah, as they always do in urban guerrilla warfare, but in nothing like the numbers the Arab media proclaimed. Some undoubtedly fell to Marine suppressing fire aimed in the general direction of attackers whom they could not see. However, the insurgents bear considerable responsibility for civilian deaths and injuries. They used women and children as couriers and fired from within occupied civilian houses. Given the number of young men who grabbed a gun to join the fight, almost on a whim, the boundary between combatant and noncombatant blurred considerably.

The backlash created by Vigilant Resolve proved too much for Baghdad and Washington to bear. On August 8, the Pentagon ordered the Marines to halt the offensive and declared a unilateral cease-fire. Negotiations with leaders from the city dragged on for weeks. Unwilling to risk the political fallout from more fighting, the CPA decided to put the city under control of the newly created "Fallujah Brigade," Iraqi soldiers commanded by a former Ba'athist general. The brigade proved unable to police the city and sometimes made common cause with the insurgents, who turned Fallujah into a safe haven (dubbed "the bomb factory"

by GIs) from which to support the insurgency throughout Iraq. In November 2004, the Marines had no choice but to go back in and clean out the hornet's nest they had nearly destroyed in April. By then, the insurgency had grown much stronger.

As the first battle of Fallujah petered out, fighting spread to the neighboring city of Ramadi. The Marine battalion deployed there engaged in aggressive patrolling to show the flag and establish psychological dominance. They adopted the British tactic, developed in Northern Ireland, of sending three squads down parallel streets to flush out insurgents and support one another if need be.[70] The insurgents sought to disrupt the patrols with a well-planned offensive against them on April 6. The fighting lasted five days and followed the same pattern unfolding in Fallujah. Insurgents of varying caliber ambushed small Marine units, pinning them down while more fighters concentrated to destroy them. This tactic, however, usually backfired as the Americans could call in air strikes, artillery, and armor to destroy their attackers. The Marines in Ramadi had an enormous advantage that their comrades in Fallujah lacked. They never came under intense and adverse media scrutiny. With all eyes focused on Fallujah, no one interfered with operations in Ramadi. They broke the back of the insurgency in the city at the cost of 16 Marines killed and over a hundred wounded.[71] This success shows what might have been achieved had the Marines in Fallujah not been reined in on the verge of victory.

The handling of Fallujah in April 2004 epitomized the ad hoc, largely ineffective approach to COIN taken during the coalition's first year in Iraq. Political leaders in Baghdad and Washington allowed the insurgents to bait them into overreacting to the murder of the Blackwater contractors. They forced the MEF into an ill-advised attack against the advice of soldiers on the ground. Despite being thrown off their plan to enter the city at the time of their choosing, the Marines came close to achieving their goal, only to have the politicians snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Attacking precipitously had been a big mistake, halting the offensive an even bigger one. The insurgents rightly believed they had won. The American show of weakness emboldened them and caused the insurgency to grow stronger.

## THE SHI'A UPRISING AND THE DRIFT TOWARD CIVIL WAR

The decision to move aggressively against a Shi'a leader seems hard to understand in the context of the wider Iraqi security situation. Four days before the murder of the Blackwater contractors, Bremer had decided to clamp down on radical Shi'a cleric Muktada al-Sadr. Sadr had been gathering his strength since the invasion, consolidating control of Shi'a

areas, and building up a militia without confronting coalition forces. The CPA suspected Sadr of murdering rival cleric Imam Abdul Majid al-Khoei, who had been negotiating with him on behalf of the Americans. The CPA had issued an arrest warrant for Sadr but had chosen not to act on it. Concerned that inflammatory rhetoric in the cleric's newspaper, *Al-Hawsa*, was encouraging attacks on U.S. troops, Bremer shut it down just four days before the murder of the contractors in Fallujah. The move provoked six straight days of protest culminating in a massive demonstration of 20,000 in Baghdad on April 3.[72]

When the Marines launched Vigilant Resolve two days later, Sadr escalated from protests to armed confrontation. His Mahdi Army, an illegal Shi'a militia, launched attacks against U.S. and British forces in Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, and Karbala. The fighting raged for weeks. Superior firepower and training proved decisive in stopping the attacks, but the Coalition backed off pursuing Sadr just as they had halted the assault on Fallujah, agreeing to a truce with the Shi'a cleric on May 27. Once again, they had weakened opposition forces without destroying them and left an architect of violent resistance in place and ready to rebuild his organization. On August 27, the Mahdi Army made another bid for control of Najaf, commencing a three-week battle that resulted in a tactical defeat at the hands of U.S. forces but, once again, left Sadr in place as a result of an agreement negotiated by Grand Ayatollah Sistani. In the future Sadr would avoid direct confrontation with coalition troops while gathering his forces for the coming struggle with the Sunni and Kurds for control of Iraq.

## ONE YEAR IN IRAQ, AN ASSESSMENT

The cease-fire in Fallujah marked almost to the day the first anniversary of the toppling of Saddam's statue in Baghdad. The United States had very little to show for its first year in Iraq. Combat troops had already stayed ninth months longer than Rumsfeld had anticipated, and yet Iraq was less secure than it had been when they arrived. American forces increasingly concentrated in fortified bases, and the Green Zone had become a veritable bunker derisively dubbed "Oz" by the soldiers. The Iraqi forces that the Pentagon had promised would step up to assume responsibility for security had proven woefully inadequate for the task. One unit deployed to Fallujah had refused to fight, others would perform only limited duties when heavily supported by American troops. Desertion remained high, morale low, discipline poor, equipment and leadership lacking. The Iraqi police either looked the other way or actively abetted insurgents and criminals.

Development and reconstruction proved almost as disappointing as security. The CPA had promised 2,300 construction projects, but only

140 had actually been started.[73] Much of the country's infrastructure had yet to be rebuilt. In many areas, delivery of vital services such as water and electricity remained below even the low levels Saddam's regime had provided during its last days. Unemployment topped 50 percent throughout most of Iraq. The vast majority of Iraqis experienced a significant decline in their quality of life.

Only in the area of political development, narrowly defined, could the administration point to any noticeable progress. In June the CPA handed responsibility over to an Interim Government under the leadership of the secular Shi'a Ayad Allawi. Paul Bremer went home to collect his Presidential Medal of Freedom along with Tommy Franks (the general who had caved into Pentagon pressure to reduce the invasion force) and Frank Tenet (head of the CIA when America suffered the worst terrorist attack in its history). Although the Council exercised little real authority outside Baghdad, President Bush focused on the hand-over as though it were the only measure of success that mattered. He was attending the NATO summit meeting in Turkey when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice passed him a note saying, "Iraq is Sovereign." He wrote a quick reply, "Let freedom reign!"[74] On the streets of most Iraqi cities, the only things that reigned were fear and insecurity.

# CHAPTER 6

# GETTING IT RIGHT

## GROPING TOWARD A SOLUTION

The failures of the lost year might have been recouped with a serious reassessment of the situation leading to an effective COIN strategy. Even the most successful COIN campaigns have lasted five to ten years, with the longest (Northern Ireland) dragging on for over 30. Most of these conflicts began badly with the security forces over-relying on purely conventional military means to counter a complex social and political threat. The more isolated the insurgency, the greater the window of opportunity the security forces had for developing the right approach. Even then, initial failures guaranteed that what might have been short wars lasted much longer.

The situation in Iraq kept the window of opportunity very small indeed. The sheer size of the country and its long insecure borders with safe havens in Syria and Iran made the insurgency difficult to contain or isolate. The Internet and satellite television guaranteed immediate scrutiny of every action by even the lowliest private. The concentration of Iraq's population in towns and cities meant that insurgents would employ urban guerrilla warfare not easily countered by conventional armed forces. Their willingness to use civilian shields provided a steady stream of atrocity stories, some real, but most distorted or fabricated. Under such circumstances, the best approach would have been to nip any insurgency in the bud, but this strategy required large numbers of troops prepared and trained to occupy much of the country and willing to use force to restore and preserve order. The coalition had perhaps a three-month honeymoon period during which most Iraqis welcomed them as liberators, followed by another three months of resignation during which disillusioned people gave the occupiers the benefit of the doubt so long as they saw some progress in rebuilding the country, and culminating in a six-month period during which disillusionment gave

way to open hostility toward occupiers who seemed to have made life worse.

The consequences of the lost year might have been less serious had failure produced a new direction in policy. Rather than overhaul its approach to Iraq, however, the administration made only minor adjustments. The president and his advisors clung to political development as the sole benchmark of success and refused to increase troop levels. This approach produced two more years of drift, allowing the insurgency to continue as sectarian violence increased. As a result, the security situation by the fall of 2006 was worse than it had been two years before. The pattern of violence changed as its intensity increased. Intercommunal conflict surpassed foreign terrorism in scope and lethality as the insurgency continued to rage. As early as the summer of 2003 and certainly by the spring of 2004, the U.S. military had recognized that it faced a complex insurgency. At the operational and tactical levels soldiers adapted to the difficult situation, developing (or rediscovering) effective COIN methods. The Army and Marine Corps captured the hard lessons of the first year in a new COIN manual. Lack of a comprehensive strategy, however, limited the effectiveness of operational and tactical improvements—as did troops shortages. An insufficient number of boots on the ground made it very difficult to consolidate gains. Absence of demonstrable progress in securing and rebuilding Iraq and a reasonable timetable for withdrawal with a viable exit strategy made it difficult to persuade the American public that any likely outcome justified the cost in blood and treasure of remaining in the country. Lack of confidence in the Bush administration eroded support for the war, culminating in the Democratic victory in the 2006 midterm elections, and persuaded the insurgents that to win they need only wait out the Americans.

## FALLUJAH II

Success came most noticeably where the coalition had failed most miserably. U.S. forces applied lessons learned in the first battle of Fallujah to recapture the city in November 2004. Before attempting this difficult operation, they resolved the structural problems of command and political oversight. On June 28, the CPA transitioned authority to an Iraqi Interim Government. The end of the CPA removed the divided command that had hampered operations in April, when Bremer controlled policy and the military conducted operations. The new commander in Iraq, General George Casey, developed a decent working relationship with the interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and made sure of his support at CENTCOM and in Washington. Allawi closed down al-Jazeera's Iraq bureau, thus preventing the TV station stirring up opposition to the operation through distorted reporting of American "atrocities."

Meanwhile, the MEF cordoned off the city while encouraging civilians to leave. By the time of the assault, perhaps as few as 400 noncombatants remained.[1] The Marines also reorganized their logistics, replacing the "push" with the "pull" approach to supply used by most large American retail stores. Instead of pushing supplies according to decisions made in the rear area, the fighting units pulled them as needed for the operation as it unfolded, using "just-in-time" shipping methods to prevent a backlog of unnecessary material and to reduce the number of convoys.[2] They did, however, stockpile enough essential material to prevent interdiction of supplies stalling the operation. They also sealed off Fallujah and requested British units be redeployed to guard roads into the city. This redeployment freed up American units for the assault and involved the British in the operation so that they could not criticize it from outside as they had done in April.[3]

On November 7, 6,500 Marines, 1,500 Army soldiers, and 2,000 Iraqi security forces launched "Operation Phantom Fury" to recapture the city they had nearly taken six months before. In fierce house-to-house fighting, they systematically cleaned out insurgent strongholds. Although the Iraqi government proclaimed Fallujah cleared on November 17, fighting continued in some neighborhoods for several weeks. Taking the city proved costly. U.S. troops killed at least 1,000 insurgents and suffered 54 dead and 425 wounded through the official end of the battle. Iraqi forces lost 8 killed and had 43 wounded.[4] The battle left 18,000 of the city's 39,000 buildings damaged or destroyed.[5] During the operation the troops captured two car-bomb and 24 bomb factories and 455 weapons caches, eliminating Fallujah as an insurgent stronghold.[6] They also found detention facilities with mutilated corpses attesting to extensive and brutal use of torture by al-Qaeda in Iraq. Though highly successful under the circumstances, the operation and the destruction it entailed would not have been necessary had the Marines been allowed to finish the job in April 2004.

## IMPROVED TACTICS

U.S. COIN tactics improved dramatically during the summer and fall of 2004. The troops still used firepower when they could employ it with limited risk to civilians, as in the second battle of Fallujah, but they no longer relied upon it as an automatic response to every threat. They cleared the city block by block, using the "squeegee" tactic: infantry following rolling mortar or artillery barrages with aerial bombardment used to crack hard points.[7] They also employed specially trained Close-Quarters Battle Teams in the most difficult areas.

A few highly publicized incidents notwithstanding, American soldiers became more disciplined and discriminating in their use of deadly force.

They accomplished this discernment in part through the highly effective use of snipers. Despite the revulsion it produces in ordinary civilians and even some soldiers, sniping is a highly effective tactic for urban counterguerrilla warfare. The sniper kills one insurgent at a time with little or no risk to innocent civilians. Firing from a hidden position at a considerable distance, he can pin down a large number of enemy combatants who cannot tell how many people are shooting at them or from where. A sniper can also take out an insurgent poised to fire an RPG or trigger an IED. In Iraq snipers have been particularly effective around mosques. Aware of American reluctance to target such religious sites, insurgents have used them as staging areas and firing positions. Snipers can kill insurgents without destroying the mosque out of which they operate.

GIs also became more savvy at countering propaganda. Americans had previously left the bodies of those killed for family members to collect. Insurgents would then take the bodies to the roof of a house, tie their hands behind their backs, shoot them in the head, and spread American shell casings around the corpses. When photographs of "murdered" Iraqis began to appear on the Internet, the troops brought the bodies back to a central location for family members to collect.

Improved intelligence facilitated the selective use of force. Over time, better relations with local leaders would produce vital information on the insurgents' whereabouts and activities. The capture of Fallujah yielded a bonanza in documents and other intelligence sources and revealed a growing rift between foreign mujahedeen and local Sunni insurgents. Because the imams would not allow them to be buried in their cemeteries, the foreigners had to be carried to a martyrs' graveyard on the outskirts of the city. Aerial surveillance of each day's burials allowed U.S. forces to determine how many mujahedeen they had killed and to gauge their numbers in real terms and as a proportion of the entire insurgent force. Further evidence of a rift surfaced after the city fell and al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi posted an audio tape on the Internet. "You have let us down in the darkest circumstances and handed us over to our enemies," he admonished the imams of Fallujah.[8] Two years later even better intelligence would bring a pair of 500-pound bombs down on Zarqawi's head, ending his reign of terror in Iraq.

## CIVIL AFFAIRS FOR HEARTS AND MINDS

COIN depends first and foremost on building trust among disaffected people. It is a struggle for legitimacy in which a threatened government and the insurgents seeking to overthrow it compete for acceptance. In the midst of any conflict, ordinary people simply try to survive, weighing which side will best be able to meet their needs in both the short and the

long term. They require first the necessities of life and then political rights. Since building trust involves changing attitudes and beliefs, this aspect of COIN has been dubbed "winning hearts and minds." Although every soldier plays an important role in gaining popular support, armed forces sometimes task specific units with taking the lead in this area.

The U.S. Army assigns primary responsibility for close cooperation with civilians to Civil Affairs (CA) units. CA began not in response to insurgency but out of a need to govern Germany after World War II. The Pentagon preserved CA units after the war and used them most commonly for disaster relief within the United States, keeping most of them in the Army Reserves. The need for CA units increased dramatically during the complex humanitarian interventions of the 1990s, particularly Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The decision to house the Army's own regular CA battalion within Special Operations Command, however, signifies recognition of its value in COIN campaigns. U.S. military doctrine also recognizes this dual capability, defining CA as

> Activities performed or supported by civil affairs that (1) enhance the relationship between military forces and civil authorities in areas where military forces are present; and (2) involve application of civil affairs functional specialty skills, in areas normally the responsibility of civil government, to enhance conduct of civil-military operations.[9]

In Iraq, CA units have done yeomen's work, living among the local people, providing security, and assisting with reconstruction. The experience of a unit formed from members of 304th and 353rd CA Battalions in the town of al-Rutbah illustrates how a hearts-and-minds campaign works. In the spring of 2004, the town consisted of little more than angry people living amid a collapsed infrastructure. The CA unit began by escorting a truckload of medical equipment and food to a local hospital, keeping it out of the hands of a thief posing as the local mayor and preventing the real mayor diverting it for his own use, to the applause of the locals. The troops then demonstrated a clear resolve to stay and work with the citizens. "Al-Rutbah is our beat now," one soldier observed. "We know it the same as we do the streets back home." Within months the unit's interpreter provided a strong endorsement of its success. "The mayor wanted electricity, and we got electricity. The mayor wanted water, and we got water," he boasted. "America is good." This hearts-and-minds campaign yielded valuable intelligence as well as appreciation. Whenever the insurgents planned an attack on the Americans, someone told the interpreter, who notified the CA unit.[10]

Although clearly the right approach, CA has suffered, like every other aspect of the campaign, from a shortage of troops. Together the Army and Marine Corps have fewer than 6,000 CA soldiers, all but two battalions of them in the Reserves. Given that only a third of a total force

can be deployed at one time (with one-third coming off deployment, and the last third preparing to deploy) and the needs of Afghanistan, only 1,800 CA troops on average have been available for deployment to Iraq.[11] Most of these have seen at least two tours. The U.S. military has too few CA units for the tasks at hand.

Fortunately, ordinary infantry can learn CA skills, just as CA troops must have good infantry skills to be effective. A U.S. company deployed to the village of Salaam to protect the Baghdad airport makes this adaptability clear. "I know this village like the back of my hand," the Company Commander observed. He chatted with locals about prices in the local market and watched for signs of inflation. He secured a water pump for the village, dined with locals, and exchanged kisses with the son of the local Sheik. He also attested to how easily his efforts could be undermined by heavy-handed tactics. When a C130 preparing to land at the airport dropped flares to counter heat seeking rockets and inadvertently set fire to crops, the captain complained, "That little bastard. He's burning my fields. I do not know why they do that." The officer compensated villagers for the damage, but they no doubt harbor lasting resentment against Americans as well.[12] The ability of U.S. troops to identify so closely with the communities to which they have been assigned represents real progress in developing an effective approach to COIN.

U.S. forces have also adopted a tactic reminiscent of the CAPs used with considerable success in Vietnam. The CAPs program stationed a platoon of twelve Marines in a village to train and support local militia to defend their homes. By living among the villagers for an extended period of time, the Marines won their trust. Hastily conscripted levies who receive limited training and serve alongside of but separate from U.S. forces do not perform as well as those in which Americans become a regular part of the unit, acting as a kind of leaven. While some effort has been made to deploy U.S. soldiers to mentor their Iraqi counterparts, too few have been deployed on this important duty. Only 4,000 American troops (as of 2006) have been assigned to military transition teams to work alongside Iraqi units, and most of these operate at battalion level or higher instead of at company, platoon or squad level where most COIN operations take place. [13]

This side-by-side approach closely approximates what the British have done for over a century. In Oman, for example, SAS units enjoyed considerable success raising, training, and leading local defense forces known as *Firqats*. These units defended their local villages, gathered intelligence on the insurgents, and even engaged in offensive operations. The key to success lay in demonstrating a long-term commitment to live with the local people until the war could be brought to a successful conclusion.[14] Small unit operations and "framework" deployment, assigning units to

Iraqi villages for long periods, have proven effective. Troops had to be reassigned from conventional duties, and although those from heavy armored formations have had the most difficulty adjusting, they too learned effective tactics.

In a few cases the coalition applied the new COIN methods on a larger scale. The reduction of the insurgent stronghold of Tal Afar by the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in the fall of 2005 provides a textbook case of how to clear and hold a threatened area. The unit first established a thorough intelligence picture of the enemy order of battle, tracing kinship lines and determining where fleeing insurgents would probably go. This preparation allowed them to detain 120 suspects as the operation began. They then sealed off the city but encouraged civilians to leave, capturing more insurgents who tried to pass through their lines with ordinary citizens of the town. Then, following four months of preparation, they systematically recaptured Tal Afar, block by block, house by house. Having cleared the town, they blanketed it with small outposts of soldiers prepared to live among the returning population and protect them.[15]

## PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

The United States expanded the CA concept, applying to Iraq a tactic that has worked reasonably well in Afghanistan. In November 2005, it set up the first Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Mosul. In launching that project, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained that the PRT sought "to marry our economic, military and political people in teams to help these local and provincial governments get the job [of reconstruction and political stabilization] done."[16] PRTs soon sprang up throughout Iraq, operating at provincial and local levels to implement macro and micro reconstruction projects. In troublesome Anbar province, the PRT worked in support of military operations; in calmer areas civilians took the lead. The program showed such promise that in the summer of 2007, the President announced that he would double the number of PRT personnel.

## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The United States also advanced its political objectives for the country. An agreement among the members of Iraq's Interim Governing Council on how to administer the country led the Bush administration to turn sovereignty of Iraq over to them on June 28, 2004. In October Iraqis approved a new constitution for the country, and in December they elected members of parliament. Political progress has been a mixed blessing. It has put an Iraqi face on the central government, but that government

has been largely ineffective as the deteriorating security situation throughout 2005 and 2006 indicates. Riddled with corruption, the national government remains deeply divided along sectarian and ethnic lines. This situation has caused ordinary Iraqis to deeply distrust their own elected representatives and to support local faction leaders instead, deepening the divisions within a country that already lacks a strong national identity. The government has also created problems for U.S. forces, which most now seek approval for operations within a sovereign state. Most observers suspect Prime Minister Nuri al-Malaki of close ties with al-Sadr, and some accuse him of blocking stronger measures against Shi'a militias.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Improved COIN tactics owed much to deliberate steps taken by military personnel to share their experiences, reflect on past mistakes, and develop a better approach to combating the insurgency. In the field commanders launched their own initiatives before the higher ranks adapted to the situation on the ground. Eventually the generals caught up with their troops, establishing better training programs and capturing the experience of Iraq in formal doctrine.

### Bloggers in Kevlar

Not surprisingly, a generation of junior officers raised with computers capitalized on the Internet before their superiors fully appreciated its potential. A small group of them created a Web site called "Company Command.com," an online forum for company commanders in Iraq to share their experiences with one another and with their comrades waiting to deploy. Posts provide a wealth of practical and theoretical information on company- and platoon-level COIN operations and tactics. Forum members circulate briefings and recommended reading lists, which include works by Vietnam era scholars such as British COIN guru Sir Robert Thompson. Those who have served in Iraq stress the importance of understanding Islam, being sensitive to local culture, and knowing at least some basic Arabic. Initially uncomfortable with such an open forum, the Army considered closing the site down but opted instead to insist that it be password protected as a secure site connected to Army Knowledge Online (AKO), the main information portal for army personnel. Active duty soldiers as well as sponsored civilians can log on to AKO, but CompanyCommand.com remains closed to all but company commanders deployed in or preparing to deploy to Iraq. Other officers may not join the forum unless they have an operational reason to do so. The officers

who created the forum monitor it to provide quality control but not to censor remarks or stifle candid conversation. To its credit, the army has allowed a frank, open discussion of the conflict, even when it includes harsh criticism of the high command. "One-third of the generals understand the science of COIN," one member wrote. "One third understand the art and the science of COIN, and one third are clueless."

AKO reaches a much broader audience, but it too contains a wealth of valuable information, albeit less focused on purely company-level operations. Outside official channels a host of blogs, and Web sites have popped up on the Internet, most sponsored by active or retired soldiers. These sites vary considerably in quality. Some contain useful information while others serve the political or other agenda of the forum master and often degenerate into gripe sessions or diatribes against the target of the day.

### Training

Following the disastrous first year, the military improved its training. Once again, improvements occurred first on the ground and then in the larger military institutions. In late 2005 General Casey created a COIN academy at headquarters in Baghdad and required all new commanders to take the five-day course that it offered. The course covered subjects ranging from a theoretical overview of COIN to practical guidance on having a meal with a sheik. Officers initially complained about "wasting" five days in school but later admitted wishing that they had taken it stateside before deployment. However, Casey created the academy in Baghdad precisely because he encountered resistance to the idea in the regular army.[17] He also created a strategy working group that produced a report on best COIN practices, an abbreviated version of which appeared in the *Military Review*. Distilled from study of past campaigns and careful reading of authoritative works written during the previous half-century, the report generated two lists, one of unsuccessful, the other of successful COIN practices. During their first year in Iraq, U.S. forces had employed virtually all of the unsuccessful practices: primacy of military in directing the campaign, emphasis on killing and capturing insurgents, large-unit operations, patterning indigenous forces on the U.S. military, and low priority given to the role of military advisors. The successful practices Casey wished to implement included emphasis on intelligence, winning trust of the local population through protecting them and meeting their needs, unity of effort, an amnesty program for former insurgents, and moving the police to the fore in the COIN campaign.[18]

The Pentagon also began paying serious attention to training units for Iraq. At Fort Irwin, its National Training Center in the Mojave Desert,

the Army built mock-ups of Iraqi villages. Units prepared for deployment by participating in simulations of manning check points, removing IEDs, searching buildings, and dealing with crowds. Iraqi expatriates from San Diego played the part of locals speaking Arabic. The simulations proved so realistic that they not only helped the military prepare soldiers for Iraq but also helped them weed out individuals poorly suited for the stresses of urban COIN.[19]

## DOCTRINE

The Army and Marine Corps jointly produced the first COIN manual since the Vietnam era, incorporating into doctrine lessons learned from three years of very difficult COIN campaigning in Iraq. *FM 3-24: COIN* contains an impressive compendium of theoretical knowledge, historical examples, and practical advice. The manual emphasizes the primacy of a political as opposed to a military solution to the conflict and stresses unity of effort in combating the insurgents. It also embraces decentralization of command and control (dubbed "Empower the Lowest Levels") and asserts the need to keep the use of force "measured." Many of these lessons could have been derived from analysis of past campaigns, but others clearly came out of Iraq. In particular, the new doctrine highlights the importance of "Managing Information and Expectations." Finally, *FM 3-24* warns the American soldier to "Prepare for a Long-Term Commitment."[20] Most of the guidance provided in the manual can be found in a spate of books written in the 1960s and 1970s, analyzing a half-century of COIN experience garnered from a series of anticolonial insurgencies after World War II. These books, which went unread for decades, figure prominently in the bibliography of the manual.

## IRAQI FORCES

Training and equipping Iraqi forces to assume responsibility for national security has figured prominently in American plans since the ill-advised decision to disband the Iraqi army in June 2003. The program got off to a bad start, largely because Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld emphasized churning out recruits as quickly as possible to justify withdrawal of American troops. Many of these recruits passed through fast-track programs lasting a few months, which left them ill-prepared for combat against tough insurgents, many of whom had served in Saddam's army. They often lacked equipment, and the weapons they did receive frequently went missing. The Pentagon mistakenly emphasized preparing the regular Iraqi army at the expense of the National Guard, the component responsible for internal security.

Following the poor performance of Iraqi units during the first battle of Fallujah, the coalition overhauled the program. The Pentagon put Lt. General David Petraeus in charge of the Multi-National Security Transition Command charged with training Iraqi forces. Petraeus began by improving logistics to make sure trainees would receive necessary equipment. Recruits went through individual and unit training before being sent into combat. As he raised units, Petraeus also built the infrastructure of the new Iraqi forces. Meanwhile, police officers from the United States and allied countries trained and equipped the Iraqi police.[21]

The results of this massive effort costing $19 billion and involving 6,000 U.S. troops have been mixed. As of September 2007, the Transition Command had trained and equipped over 160,000 members of the security forces (army, national guard, and police), bringing force totals to approximately 131,000 soldiers and 134,000 police, but the units varied dramatically in quality. Only about 10,000 of its soldiers have demonstrated that they can act alone. The rest must be paired with U.S. units or given considerable American support.[22] Even those Iraqi units that can act independently do so only under favorable circumstances. Kurdish units can provide security independently, but only in Kurdish areas. Sunni units may be effective against foreign fighters but not against Sunni insurgents. Iraqi civilians constantly complain that the police behave differently toward Shi'a and Sunni depending on their own ethnic background. A bipartisan Congressional subcommittee also found "strong evidence that some [Iraqi Security Forces] are independently committing sectarian violence and other illegal activity."[23] Sectarianism divides the security forces as it does every other Iraqi institution, preventing creation of a truly national army, national guard, and national police force. Given such deep divisions, it remains to be seen whether training more recruits improves security or increases the likelihood of a bloody civil war once the United States leaves.

## STRESSES AND STRAINS

Despite marked improvements in COIN tactics and operations, progress in Iraq continued to be halting and uneven with some major setbacks as well as significant successes. The campaign as whole continued to suffer from the same shortage of personnel and institutional resistance to change that have plagued it from the outset. While some formations deployed in small units to live among the people, others remained hunkered down in large fire-support bases, remote from those they had to protect. Even if the coalition wanted to blanket Iraq with small-unit framework deployment, it lacked the requisite number of troops to carry out such a plan. The frustrating and at times enervating task of incessantly

patrolling the same troubled streets, taking casualties without seeing any visible improvement in the security situation inevitably takes its toll on soldiers. While the vast majority of them have maintained admirable discipline and shown considerable restrain under trying circumstances, a few have not.

On November 19, 2005, a Marine patrol on duty in Haditha lost one of its members to an IED. The young, tired, and overextended Marines belonged to a company of 160 asked to keep order in a town of 90,000 with a strong insurgent presence. The death of a beloved corporal provided the proverbial last straw. The unit returned to the town that night and in the morning delivered the bodies of 24 Iraqis, some of them women and children, to the local hospital.[24] Several individuals currently await trial while charges against others have been dropped. The fact that one Lt. Colonel faces court martial for failing to adequately investigate the incident suggests a cover-up, which has further undermined U.S. credibility. In another infamous incident, a former American soldier, Steven Green, has been convicted of raping a 14-year-old girl and then murdering her and her family in March 2006 to cover up the crime. Other members of his unit have been convicted as accessories to the crime. Fortunately, these isolated incidents, a handful of excesses that inevitably accompany COIN, occurred at a time when the treatment of Iraqis by U.S. forces has improved dramatically, but they have hurt the American cause.

Viewed from another level, however, these crimes indicate the enormous stress under which American forces have been placed. As units prepare for their third rotation to Iraq, other strains are beginning to show. In August 2006, the Army recalled 300 members of the 172nd Striker Brigade just returned home to Alaska from a year's tour of duty and sent them back for another four months to deal with escalating violence in Baghdad. The soldiers had gotten to spend between three and five weeks with their families.[25] In 2005, more than one-third of West Point Graduates from the class of 2000 left the army after fulfilling their mandatory five-year term, the second year in a row to see such declining retention.[26] The divorce rate among Army personnel doubled between 2001 and 2004.[27] Even the Marines, who generally have little trouble getting volunteers, have had to resort to mandatory recalls of inactive reservists because of an anticipated shortfall of 2,500 volunteers for Afghanistan and Iraq.[28] In fiscal year 2007, the Army met its recruitment quotas but did so by lowering standards. Eleven percent of recruits needed "character waivers" to excuse criminal offenses that would otherwise have disqualified them from service, up from 7.9 percent the previous year.[29]

In the midst of these difficulties, however, U.S. forces experienced one of their most dramatic successes. On June 7, 2006 they conducted a precision air strike against a safe house Northeast of Baghdad killing

Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi, leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. A series of raids on other locations accompanied this action, netting a wealth of intelligence on the insurgents. The Jordanian terrorist leader had been the most ruthless opponent of the United States and moderate Iraqis. Although the details of the operation that killed al-Zarqawi remain classified, a great deal can be surmised from official reports and public statements. Clearly, U.S. forces received very precise intelligence on the al-Qaeda leader and his whereabouts, probably with the help of the Jordanians and quite possibly from other insurgents. This intelligence coup may have been the product of the new American approach to countering the Iraqi insurgency or it may reflect the new phase into which the insurgency has entered. Persuaded that their future lay with the government, ordinary Iraqis may have willingly provided the vital information on al-Zarqawi's whereabouts, or insurgents fighting for control of the country may have considered him a liability.

## AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY?

Failure to convert effective tactics and good operations into victory stemmed in no small measure from the lack of a comprehensive COIN strategy. In November 2005, the White House finally published such a plan, the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*. The long delay in drafting such a statement testifies to an inability or unwillingness to recognize the nature of the conflict during its initial phase. Although the document represented a significant improvement over the initial approach to the insurgency, it still contained serious weaknesses that had to be addressed a year later in the wake of the Baker-Hamilton Report.

The *Strategy* clearly articulated a comprehensive, long-haul approach to COIN based on three broad tracks. The political track called for *isolating* extremists from the general population, who must be persuaded to support the new Iraq; *engaging* people outside the political process "through ever-expanding avenues of peaceful participation"; and *building* "stable, pluralistic, and effective national institutions." The security track required *clearing* areas held by the insurgents; *holding* those areas so that the insurgents can not return; and *building* "Iraqi Security Forces and the capacity of local institutions to deliver services, advance the rule of law, and nurture civil society." The economic track sought to "*restore* Iraq's neglected infrastructure"; *reform* the country's economy "so that it can be self-sustaining in the future"; and "*build* the capacity of Iraqi institutions to maintain infrastructure, rejoin the international economic community, and improve the general welfare of all Iraqis."[30] Finally, the *Strategy* acknowledged that "victory will take time," although it did not suggest how long the campaign will last.[31]

In addition to its obvious strengths, the *Strategy* had some glaring weaknesses. The document doggedly insisted on seeing Iraq as the "central front in the global war on terrorism," even though few independent analysts understood the conflict in those terms.[32] In fact, treating Iraqi insurgents as synonymous with al-Qaeda terrorists had made it difficult to separate moderates from extremists, a stated objective of the *Strategy*. In addition, the document grossly oversimplified the nature of the insurgency. Other than a reference to the "continued existence and influence of militias and armed groups, often affiliated with political parties," it did not even discuss these militias, who often served clan and religious leaders rather than political parties, or suggest how to combat them.[33] The strategy also failed to address growing sectarian violence and the prospect of a civil war along religious lines. In a further complication, while the document insisted that the United States had no intention of imposing any particular form of government on Iraqis, many within the country and the wider Middle East believed that the Americans did seek to establish their own version of secular democracy in Iraq.

These weaknesses notwithstanding, the *Strategy* offered a viable approach to countering the Iraqi insurgency. It included many key elements found in successful COIN, though most notably it omitted any reference to restraint in the use of force. The major problem lay not with methods but with means. The stated objective to clear and hold territory can be little more than a platitude without the requisite number of troops to carry it out. U.S. forces understood what needed to be done but still lacked the resources to do it. Another year would pass before the Surge would give them sufficient troops to significantly improve the security situation.

## THE CHANGING PATTERN OF VIOLENCE

Unfortunately, as U.S. forces adapted so did the insurgents. During 2005 and 2006, the pattern of violence changed significantly. Sensing the danger posed by American efforts to create a working government and to rebuild Iraqi security forces, they concentrated their efforts on disrupting emerging political and security institutions. Throughout 2005, they focused more and more on killing Iraqis who volunteered to serve in the police or the army. By the end of the year, the conflict began to unfold in a new direction as sectarian violence flared up and increased dramatically in 2006.

The year 2005 began inauspiciously with the assassination of the governor of Baghdad province, Ali al-Haidari, on January 4 as a part of a failed insurgent effort to disrupt national elections. On February 28, a suicide car bomber killed 115 people gathered to apply for jobs with the

Iraqi national police in the town of Hilla. Insurgents would continue to kill Americans when and wherever they could, but they had far greater success intimidating anyone who cooperated with the U.S.-backed government. Assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings became an almost daily occurrence. Suicide bombs, especially cars, surpassed IEDs in inflicting the greatest damage, particularly against Iraqis. On July 17, a suicide bomber blew up a fuel truck in Musayyib, killing at least 70, as four other suicide bombers struck Baghdad the same day. On November 7, a suicide bomber killed four American soldiers in Baghdad. Three days later al-Qaeda in Iraq bombed a Baghdad café frequented by police, killing 30. A bomb blast in Fallujah killed 10 Marines on December 2. On December 6, insurgents bombed the police academy, killing at least 36 people.

As attacks on Iraqi police continued, violence spread in a new direction. Until late 2005, a tacit but uneasy truce and occasional cooperation among Shi'a militias, Sunni insurgents, and foreign mujahedeen held as all three wanted the Americans to leave Iraq. This situation changed on November 18, when two men walked into two Shi'a mosques in Khanaqin in the Kurdish area and detonated their suicide vests. The attacks killed about 70 people and launched a wave of sectarian violence that has continued to the present. A struggle for control of the country took its place alongside the Sunni insurgency and foreign terrorism to complicate the security situation and further tax coalition forces already overextended (see Figure 6.1). Sectarian violence escalated dramatically with the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque (Shi'a Islam's holiest site in Iraq) in Samarra on February 22, 2006. The blast destroyed the mosque's famous golden dome and unleashed a series of tit-for-tat sectarian killings that left more than 1,000 dead in a matter of days. The killings would continue throughout the year. Suicide bombing remained a favorite tactic, but the security forces routinely found the bodies of young men tortured and mutilated by one side or the other. "Operation Swarmer," launched against insurgents near Samarra in March, contained but could not stop the sectarian violence, which brought the country to the brink of civil war. In late July 2006, Iraqi and U.S. forces launched "Operation Together Forward" to clear and hold Baghdad neighborhoods dominated by insurgents and militias. The operation called for military units to establish order, restore vital services, set up advisory councils, and hand over control to Iraqi military and police units.[34] This approach duplicated the oil-spot strategy employed during classic COIN campaigns in which forces secured areas and expanded control outward from them.[35] It also tried to repeat the success achieved with the same tactics elsewhere in Iraq, most notably Tal Afar in the fall of 2005. Although it got off to a good start, thanks to additional U.S. troops being moved to Baghdad from elsewhere in

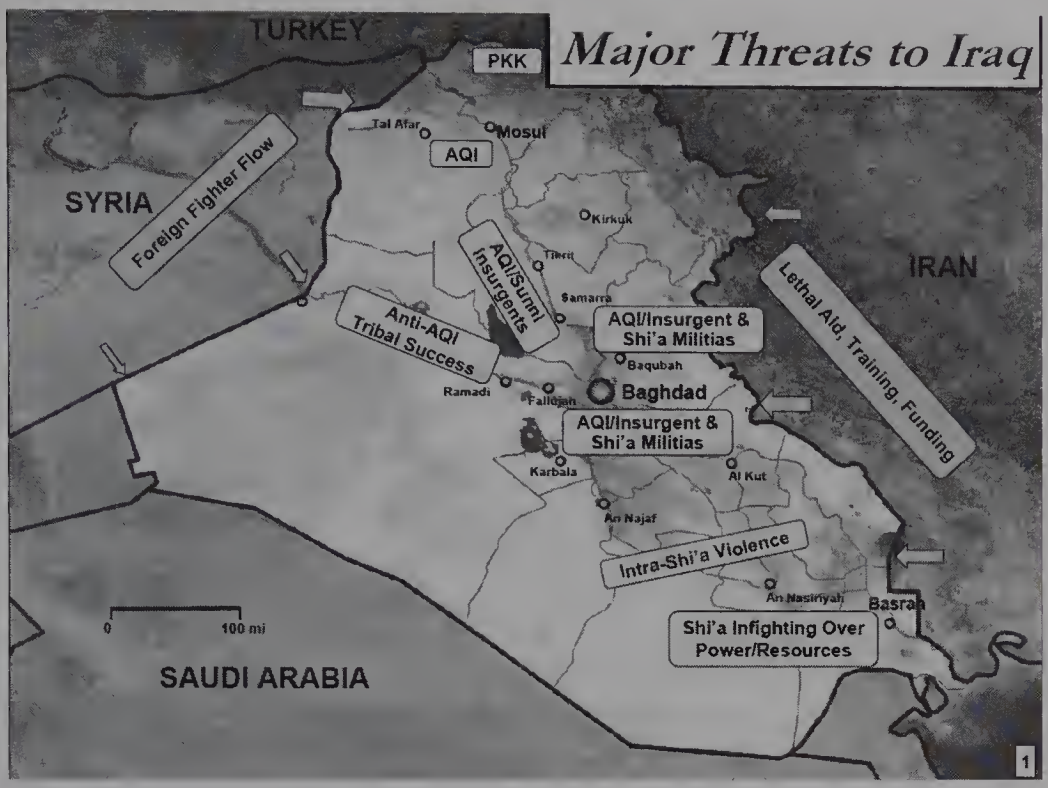



**Figure 6.1**

*Source*: General Petraeus Briefing Slides, Report to Congress, September 2007.

Iraq, the operation eventually ran into the same perennial problems that have dogged all security efforts. The Americans had too few troops to hold what they had cleared, and they could not trust Iraqi units to be impartial.

Far from making Iraq more stable, elections had led to increased violence. In its August 2006 report to Congress, the Pentagon admitted that the number of attacks per week had increased 15 percent and the number of Iraqi casualties 51 percent over the previous quarter.[36] A UN report painted an even bleaker picture of conditions. According to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, 14,338 civilians had been killed between January and June. In addition to ordinary civilians, insurgents, foreign terrorists, and sectarian militias targeted individuals crucial to rebuilding Iraq: judges, university professors, teachers, students, and health-care workers. The report also expressed concern over the displacement of people due to ethnic violence. From the attack on the Golden Mosque in February to the end of June, 150,000 had fled their homes, bringing the number of internally displaced people within Iraq to 1.3 million.[37] By the end of the third year of occupation the security situation had grown more complex and violent with no end to the conflict in sight (see Figure 6.1).

## RECONSTRUCTION

The *Strategy for Victory in Iraq* emphasized reconstruction and economic development. Half a century of COIN experience confirmed the wisdom of this emphasis as the best way to win the hearts and minds of disaffected people. Unfortunately, the administration had taken the same haphazard approach to these vital activities as it did to all other aspects of COIN. Counting on handing over to an existing Iraqi administration, neither the Pentagon nor the White House figured that anything would need to be rebuilt or developed, so they failed to plan adequately for either task. Following destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure and the outbreak of the insurgency, the United States ramped up its effort but did so with a series of ad hoc responses that, like the military campaign, followed no comprehensive strategic plan. The effort resulted in waste, duplication, corruption, and some rebuilding, but not enough to return the quality of Iraqi life to prewar levels.

To audit and report on the progress of projects Congress created the office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR). During the year of transition to democracy, the SIGIR issued reports documenting significant accomplishments as well as serious problems. Most important, these reports noted how far short of the need the effort fell. With 67 percent of the $21 billion allocated for reconstruction disbursed, most major initiatives had been launched. Despite this effort, neither production of oil and gas nor delivery of electricity and drinking water had returned to prewar levels. Insurgent attacks disrupted and delayed many projects, but corruption and mismanagement robbed the effort of needed funds. The SIGIR opened 72 cases involving fraud, theft, bribery, and other crimes. Cost overruns and excessive overhead padding in many contracts further diverted money from reconstruction. In the health-care sector, only 20 of 150 contracted clinics had actually been built. In the transportation and communications sector, only 4 percent of trains ran each day, but 5.2 million more Iraqis had cell phones than before the war. This increase proved a mixed blessing as mobile phones allowed insurgents to communicate with one another and trigger IEDs. Approximately half of Iraq's 14,000 schools had been rebuilt or refurbished by March 31, 2006. Although delivery of electricity had still not reached prewar levels, the power industry distributed it more fairly. Baghdad received less than it had before the war, the rest of the country more. However, demand for electricity outstripped supply by 60 percent. Water and sanitation systems had deteriorated from years of sanctions and neglect to the point where fewer than half of all Iraqis had an adequate supply of clean drinking water on the eve of the U.S. invasion. Whatever improvements U.S. contractors made, the supply of potable water fell far short of demand.[38]

## IRAQ STUDY GROUP REPORT

The most scathing criticism of the administration's Iraq policy came not from an international organization or a Congressional watchdog agency but from a bipartisan commission convened to assess the situation in Iraq and recommend courses of action. Cochaired by Republican James A. Baker III and Democrat Lee H. Hamilton, the Iraq Study Group delivered the findings of its nine-month investigation in the fall of 2006. "The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating," the report began bluntly. "There is no path that can guarantee success, but the prospects can be improved."[39] It warned of dire consequences, including collapse of the Iraqi government, a humanitarian crisis, and a wider conflict if corrective action were not taken promptly. The report called upon the United States to engage Iraq's neighbors in direct negotiations to end their support for various insurgent groups and militias and elicit their cooperation in ending the struggle. It also identified resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict as an essential prerequisite to settling Iraq. The group further called upon the Iraqi government to accelerate assuming responsibility for national security with U.S. forces increasingly providing support instead of direct action.[40]

## THE SURGE AND BEYOND

While it accepted some recommendations of the Study Group, the Bush administration refused to engage Syria or Iran and resisted pressuring Israel and the Palestinians to reach a solution, even though the United States gives liberal amounts of foreign aid to both. It opted instead to deploy an additional 20,000–30,000 U.S. combat troops to Iraq and to increase the number of personnel assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Known as the "Surge," this plan increased the capacity of U.S. forces to suppress insurgent activity and sectarian violence in Baghdad, Anbar province, and other key areas. Increased security would buy additional time for the Iraqi government to promote national reconciliation and for Iraqi security forces to improve to the point at which they could assume direct responsibility for security. It took until the spring of 2007 to deploy the additional troops. The new coalition commander, General David Petraeus, delivered an interim report to Congress in June, saying that progress would not be discernable until at least September, when he would return with a full assessment (see Figures 6.2 and 6.3).

As many observers predicted, the fall report indicated that the Surge was producing mixed results. The troops had achieved some notable success but it would take another 12–18 months before Iraqi forces could assume primary responsibility for security. The surge had reduced overall violence but only to the levels of early 2006, which were still much higher than they had been in the fall of 2004. Petraeus announced that the

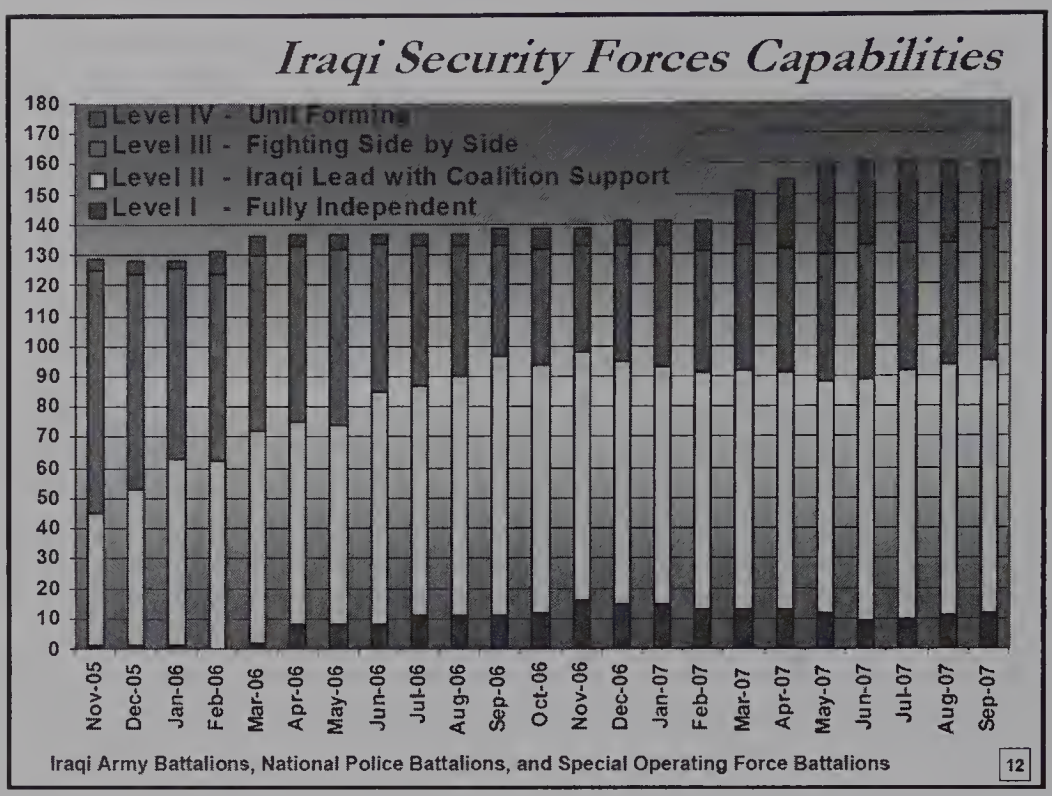



**Figure 6.2**

*Source:* Briefing Slides, General Petraeus Report to Congress.

American force could be reduced to its pre-surge level of 130,000 beginning in June 2008 but that further troops reductions must be tied to progress on the ground.[41] The president touted a decrease in violent attacks by al-Qaeda in Iraq, overlooking the fact that the organization had not even existed prior to the invasion. His critics noted that al-Qaeda accounted for only 10–15 percent of the violence in Iraq and that the domestic insurgency remained strong. Foreign fighters had always been suspect and had probably outlived their usefulness to all indigenous factions. It came as no surprise then, that Iraqis would cooperate in getting rid of them. Many experts also worried that the Shi'a militias were simply lying low, content to have the Americans weaken the Sunnis while husbanding their own resources for the civil war to follow American withdrawal.

On the ground, officers on their second or third rotation noticed improvements. One commander in Anbar province described the local population as "very supportive." "Local tips have been instrumental in detaining insurgents and saving my own men from IEDs," he observed. He also noted that while the Iraqi army was becoming more professional and competent, the police remained riddled with corruption. Finally, he concluded with pride, "after four years and much retraining on COIN,

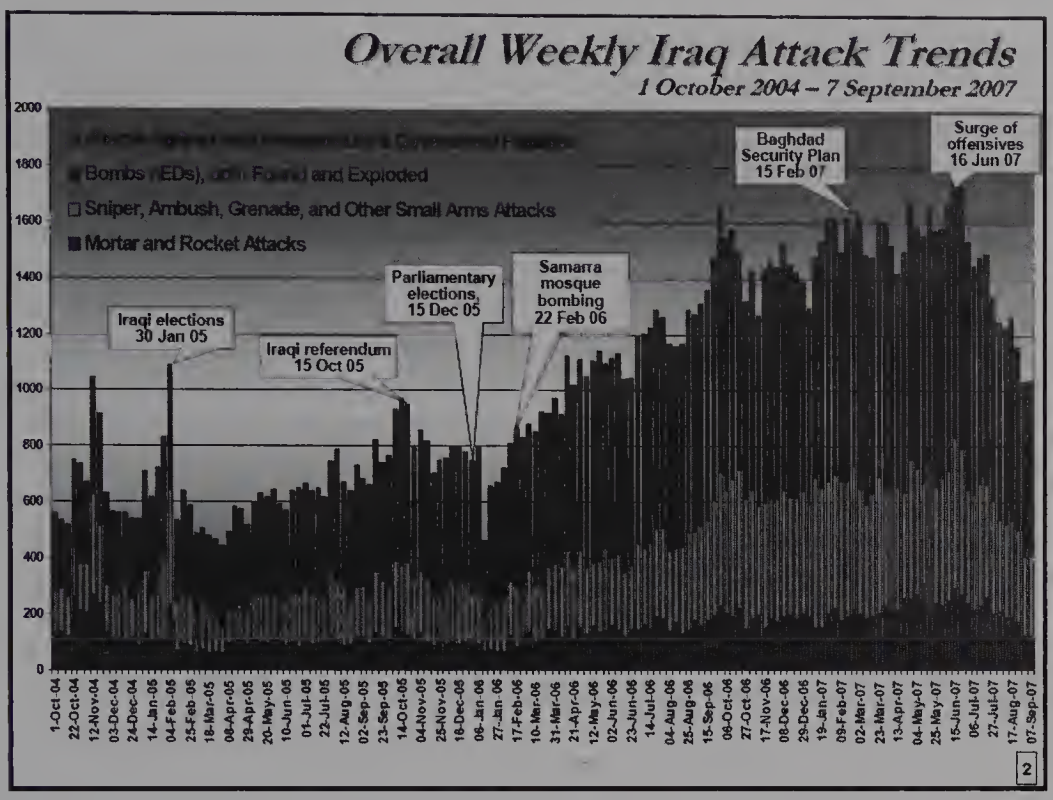



**Figure 6.3**

*Source:* Briefing Slides, General Petraeus Report to Congress.

Law of Land Warfare and cultural awareness, the American Soldier is the most trusted security force among the local population." This source of pride did, however, have a dark side. Why did the Iraqis trust the Americans more than they did their own security forces? What would happen once the GIs left?

Considerable evidence suggests that decreasing violence may have owed as much to other factors as it did to the Surge. Just as the extra combat troops began to arrive in the spring of 2007, General Petraeus increased emphasis on working with a movement known as the Anbar Awakening. Fed up with foreign terrorists who brought them no benefit, tribal Sheiks in Anbar province began working more closely with the Americans to defeat al-Qaeda in Iraq. Concerned Local Citizens Councils received funding from the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP). CERP funds paid local militias, including many former insurgents, to police their own communities and cooperate with Iraqi government and U.S. forces. In addition, a unilateral cease-fire declared by Muktada al-Sadr in August 2007 and renewed in August 2008 reduced clashes with his powerful militia. Finally, the exodus of both Shi'a and Sunni families from mixed neighborhoods also lessened intercommunal

violence. Whether these factors produce a permanent change or a temporary lull remains to be seen.

## IN THE NICK OF TIME OR TOO LITTLE TOO LATE?

Three and a half years into a war that was supposed to be over in three months, U.S. forces have learned and practice effective COIN techniques. The new approach has produced promising results. Reconstruction and development are progressing but still fall woefully short of meeting Iraqi needs. American advisors have trained and educated large, well-equipped Iraqi security forces, but the quality of units varies dramatically, and sectarian divisions within the forces as a whole prevent them being a truly national institution. The surge not withstanding, the coalition still lacked enough troops to do its job properly. In the meantime, the American public was growing tired of the conflict and increasingly critical of how it has been handled. The U.S. military might well find itself in the uncomfortable position of having found the right approach just as political will for continuing the war evaporates.

# CONCLUSIONS

# PROSPECTS, POSSIBILITIES, AND LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

## ASSESSMENT

No war still in progress can be completely assessed, especially while its outcome remains in doubt. The development of the campaign to date does, however, suggest a limited number of ways the conflict can unfold. The conduct of operations thus far certainly can yield valuable lessons on the nature of contemporary insurgency and how best to combat it. The U.S. military has already drawn poignant conclusions about the war in its recent COIN publications. Whether these lessons make a lasting impact on training and doctrine or the Army and Marines turn their back on Iraq as they did on Vietnam remains to be seen. One thing, however, is certain: insurgency will remain as prevalent a form of conflict in the twenty-first century as it was in the twentieth.

## POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

While the final outcome of the war remains unclear, the United States has fairly limited range of options. Iraq no longer figures as the main issue motivating voters as it did in the fall of 2006. That could, of course, change with renewed violence leading to increasing American casualties. Few politicians demand immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces or advocate an open-ended commitment at current troop levels. Proposals for a future Iraq strategy fall into two more moderate categories: phased withdrawal according a reasonable timetable and gradual troop reductions as circumstances on the ground permit.

### Withdrawal by the Calendar

The harshest critics of the war continue to call for establishing immediately a timetable for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq. They argue that the presence of American soldiers relieves the Iraqi government of responsibility for its own security. Withdrawal will compel the Iraqi security forces to take charge. Proponents of this approach dismiss concerns that Iraq will descend into chaos and civil war with two compelling arguments. If the presence of American troops alone prevents it, then some degree of fratricide will probably happen anyway and little can be gained by delaying it. On the other hand, Iraqis weary from five years of war may find intercommunal accommodation preferable to more bloodshed. In either case, the presence of U.S. forces merely postpones the inevitable. They also challenge the assumption that early withdrawal will create a dangerous power vacuum in the Middle East that Iran might exploit. Opposition to the United States alone unites Syria, Iran, and certain elements in Saudi Arabia that would soon be at odds the minute the Americans left. Saudi interests would continue to support the Sunnis, as they do now, perhaps in cooperation with the Syrians. Together they might offset the Shi'a power. However, given the disproportionate size and strength of Iran relative to the two Sunni nations, this belief may be wishful thinking.

Advocates of phased withdrawal also raise concerns about the strategic implications of tying down so many American troops in Iraq for an extended period. Demands of this deployment and the ongoing mission in Afghanistan leave U.S. forces spread so thin that their ability to respond to any other crisis has been seriously compromised. That overextension and the huge cost of the war strengthen the rationale for troop reductions.

### Troop Reductions as Circumstances Permit

The Bush administration and its supporters argue vehemently that any timetable for withdrawal of U.S. forces sends the wrong message to insurgents. Keenly aware of American war weariness, they could simply lay low and wait out the coalition. Iraqis debating the wisdom of siding with an American-backed government would certainly hesitate to do so if they felt their protectors would soon leave. A precipitous departure would also produce a dangerous power vacuum, so the argument goes, which Iran would quickly fill. The president does, however, support reducing the contingent to its pre-surge level sometime next summer.

Though debatable, these arguments have some merit. The same cannot be said for the disingenuous assertion that Iraq is the central front in the global war on terrorism. Saddam Hussein's Iraq did not harbor al-Qaeda operatives, who loathed the dictator for his un-Islamic lifestyle and

persecution of clerics. The main terrorist organization in the country to date, al-Qaeda in Iraq developed as a direct response to the American-led invasion. At present the organization accounts for perhaps 10–15 percent of violence in the country. President Bush has repeatedly pointed to the reduction in violence perpetrated by those foreign terrorists in Iraq as evidence that his surge strategy is working. His argument sounds like that of an arsonist demanding credit for fighting a fire he actually started.

### Partition Hard or Soft

Desire to goad the fledgling Iraqi government into assuming greater responsibility for its own national security has led many experts and the U.S. Senate to propose a "soft partition" of Iraq. This plan would grant considerable autonomy to the country's three broad ethnic regions within a loose federation: a Kurdish north, a Sunni center, and a Shi'a south. Proponents argue that this approach might be the only way to avert civil war. No longer fearful of domination by other ethnic groups, each region could concentrate on securing and stabilizing its own ethnic area. Critics point out that sorting out mixed areas such as Kirkuk could be problematic and bloody. They also fear that a soft partition would lead inevitably to a hard one, the complete breakup of Iraq as a nation, with the three weak successor states at risk of domination by strong neighbors.

On September 27, 2007, the Senate voted 75 to 23 in favor of a resolution advocating soft partition of Iraq. Despite this unusual show of bipartisanship, the resolution produced a storm of protest from the Iraqi government and the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, which stated that partition is not an option. The Senate vote followed months of scholarly debate on the subject. Brookings Institute fellows Edward Joseph and Michael O'Hanlon make a compelling case for partition, not as the best of all possible solutions, but as the least of all evils. They note that Iraqis have been voting for partition over the last two years, voting with their feet, their ballots, and their bombs. In all Iraqi elections, voting has been overwhelmingly along sectarian lines, as has most of the fighting since the bombing of the Golden Mosque in February 2006. Iraqis have been moving by choice or coercion out of mixed neighborhoods for some time. Finally, Baghdad has not exercised real sovereignty over Kurdish Iraq since 1991.[1]

Critics of the partition plan, like Joost Hiltermann, deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa program of the International Crisis Group, argue that its proponents misread the situation Iraq. Only the Kurds wholeheartedly back partition, which they already de facto enjoy.

Just one of the Shi'a parties, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic in Iraq, advocates partition and then only if it leads to the creation of a Shi'a superstate controlling 70–80 percent of Iraqi oil. Divided as they are on most issues, the Sunnis strongly oppose partition, which would leave them with little but promises that the Kurds and Shi'a would share their oil. He suggests an asymmetric Federation granting the Kurds greater autonomy than the 15 Arab provinces of Iraq and putting real pressure on the Iraqi government to form a true "national compact."[2]

## FROM POSSIBILITIES TO REALITY

While it may not be possible to say which if any of these scenarios will play out, time and circumstances continue to narrow choices. The administration's Iraq policy looks less like a strategy for exiting Iraq than it does a plan for exiting Mr. Bush from the White House so that he can pass the war on to his successor without accepting responsibility for any possible failure. No significant change in approach seems likely to occur before the change of administration in January 2009. Neither an extended U.S. deployment at current troop levels nor a prompt and complete withdrawal seems likely.

The best solution (or the least undesirable option) may be a compromise between these two extremes. The United States could significantly reduce its troop strength, perhaps cutting it by half over the course of year, pulling the remaining troops into the Kurdish zone and keeping fortified enclaves in Baghdad's Green Zone and a few other key points. The Kurds would be more than happy to welcome the Americans, who have supported them since 1991. A significant American presence in this region should allay Turkish fears that the autonomous region is the first step toward a greater Kurdistan encompassing part of southeastern Turkey. Downsizing/redeployment also would confront the Shi'a and Sunni with a stark choice: they could have their civil war or work out an accommodation. The threat of Iranian support for the Shi'a might be balanced by the virtual certainly of Saudi and perhaps Syrian support for the Sunni. A substantial U.S. presence in the Gulf should deter direct Iranian intervention that could be stopped by air and sea action without substantial risk to American ground forces. The ability of the U.S. Navy to interdict oil exports via the Persian Gulf provides an added incentive to good behavior. Those objecting that such a strategy risks military confrontation with Iran should consider the even greater risk that continued occupation of Iraq poses. How long will the Pentagon and the public tolerate American soldiers being killed by sophisticated Iranian weapons smuggled to Shi'a militias without demanding military action?

## ASSESSMENT

However the Iraq war ends, history will hardly judge it an unqualified success. The U.S. military invaded a large, populous, and internally divided country with insufficient troops to occupy and secure it. For almost a year the Bush administration denied the existence of an insurgency plainly evident to any solider on the ground two months into the occupation. Having at last admitted the obvious, the Pentagon took another three years to craft a workable COIN strategy, by which time support for the war at home and abroad had eroded. Throughout this time American soldiers rapidly adapted, devising effective tactics and making the best of a very bad situation. Precisely *why* the United States has had such difficulty with irregular warfare remains to be considered. This complex question cannot be answered by latching onto scapegoats or providing simplistic analysis, though there is plenty of individual and corporate blame to go around. Behind these mistakes, however, lie long term structural issues for which no individual bears responsibility.

### Politicians and Policy Makers

Soldiers in democratic societies frequently fault their political masters for military failures. They complain of being sent against their advice and poorly equipped into badly conceived interventions with insufficient political support only to be blamed when things invariably go wrong. Such complaints overlook the fact that military action is a political instrument not an end in itself, and they have too often been mustered to cover purely military blunders. In the case of Iraq, however, the complaints have considerable merit. Policy failures, more than anything else, account for the problems the coalition has faced in Iraq. So many clear and consistent warnings repeated so often by so many professional soldiers, retired and active, and scholars in universities and think tanks (both liberal and conservative) make these policy failures especially egregious. Seldom in the long history of the Republic have our men and women in uniform been so badly served by their civilian masters, elected and appointed, on both sides of the political aisle.

The Bush administration and the Republican Congress in power for the first four years of the conflict bear primary responsibility for what journalist Tom Ricks has appropriately dubbed a fiasco. Once he had decided on war with Iraq, the president remained aloof from serious debates on how best to conduct it, shielded by a triumvirate of Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Rice and unwilling to force the Secretaries of Defense and State (Colin Powell) to air their obvious disagreements before him so that he could make informed decisions. Rumsfeld drove out or brow beat into submission any military or civilian in the Pentagon who would challenge his

ideas. He and the administration as a whole created an atmosphere that treated disagreement as disloyalty, a sentiment they communicated to the general public by impugning the patriotism of any politician or public figure who questioned the decision to go to war or the manner in which the White House conducted the campaign. As a result the Secretary of Defense got a compliant top brass that allowed him to micromanage the operations plan, whittling down the invasion force to the barest minimum and refusing to allow any serious contingency planning for COIN.

The Republican Congress rubber-stamped everything the president requested with a wink and a nod. Democratic Senators challenged the case for invading Iraq, but in the end, most voted for the war. Many later claimed that if only they had known how flimsy the intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was, they would not have supported the invasion. An independent intelligence assessment conducted by the Senate Committee on Armed Services and a host of skeptical reports and commentaries by independent experts and agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Commission, make these pleas of ignorance rather disingenuous. Congressional opposition to the war followed rather than led public opinion. Swept into control of both houses by voter anger over Iraq in 2006, the Democrats have been unwilling to force the president's hand by cutting off funding for the war. Such a move would, of course, have left them open to accusations that they failed to support the troops and would not have prevented the President continuing the operations in any case.

### The Top Brass

Serving military officers do not get to pick their political bosses, nor can they enter into public debate on policy matters. However, those in the highest positions—the service chiefs, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the regional commanders—advise the Secretary of Defense. The Goldwater-Nichols Act gave the chairman direct access to the President to insure that he would always receive military advice without civilian interference. Generals and admirals may also be called to testify before Congress, and they can make their concerns known anonymously through their allies on Capitol Hill and via discreet leaks to the press. As a last resort, flag officers who vehemently object to a policy decision can resign and go public with their objections, since retired officers can air their views more freely. Given that the service chiefs, the chairman, and the regional commanders have already earned four stars, the military's highest rank, they could hardly claim that such action would be detrimental to their careers.

The processes put in place by the Goldwater-Nichols Act to make sure the President would receive military as well as civilian advice and

increase the likelihood of a full and frank discussion before any military action completely broke down in the Bush administration. Only General Eric Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the Army, challenged in public testimony to Congress the Pentagon's plan to invade Iraq with fewer than 200,000 troops. General Meyers and General Franks acquiesced in Rumsfeld's continual demands to make the invasion force ever smaller, no matter what they felt or their subordinates urged. Meyers never really challenged Rumsfeld nor did he go to Congress or the President with an alternative view of the situation. Franks caved in to Rumsfeld on virtually every contested point, led the invasion, retired, collected his Medal of Freedom, and then went on to endorse President Bush at the 2004 Republican convention. General Peter Pace, who succeeded Meyers as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, insisted throughout his term that the war was going well despite mounting evidence to the contrary. On August 3, 2006, Rumsfeld, Pace, and General John Abizaid (Franks's successor at CENTCOM) appeared before the Senate Committee on Armed Services to answer questions on a range of defense matters. Asked by Senator John McCain if he had anticipated the previous year Iraq degenerating into civil war, Pace replied, "No Sir." Asked the same question, Abizaid disagreed, saying that "a year ago it was clear to see that sectarian tensions were increasing," although he did admit that he had not foreseen the intensity of intercommunal violence.[3] A strong impression of Pace as an administrative yes-man led to his nonrenewal as Chairman in 2007.

### Structural Problems

Bad policy, civilian micromanagement, and the failure of top brass to challenge the Secretary of Defense created a very serious situation in Iraq, but they do not alone explain the military's difficulty in adjusting to it. COIN has always been challenging for conventional military establishments but especially so for the post-Vietnam U.S. military. A complex series of factors explain this difficulty, and the concept of "blame" does not help in understanding them. A generation of dedicated officers rebuilt the Army and Marine Corps into an all-volunteer conventional force and kept it focused on conventional war in Germany's Fulda Gap and on the Korean Peninsula. They created forces based on heavy mechanized units reliant on high-tech weapons to compensate for the Soviet advantage in numbers. They also reduced the proportion of infantry in the force mix, cutting the combat arm most necessary in urban COIN, in real numbers and as a percentage of total manpower. This conventional strategy helped win the Cold War. When that conflict ended, however, the military proved resistant to change. As a result, the Pentagon invaded

Iraq with armed forces designed in the late 1970s for conventional war, augmented by high-tech weapons and committed to joint operations, but otherwise unchanged in its fundamental approach to fighting. It should come as no surprise that such a military would find a complex COIN campaign extremely problematic.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact of the Vietnam War on American military culture. Career officers cared less about denying responsibility for the defeat than they did about turning their back on the whole idea of COIN. Even Creighton Abrams, the one general who thoroughly understood COIN, announced that the army would never fight such a war again. Young officers interested in studying various aspects of the conflict were told, "We have put that behind us, and for the sake of your career, you should too." This attitude inhibited serious assessment of the war within the military and precluded the vast majority of officers even reading studies done by academics and other experts. With this approach the military could derive but one lesson from Vietnam: never engage in a protracted COIN campaign again. It might have been a valid lesson if the armed forces always got to pick their conflicts. During the Cold War, they pretty much did, but their aversion to unconventional conflict left them woefully unprepared when the Bush administration handed them Iraq. The creation of Special Operations Command in 1986 solved the problem in the short term and exacerbated it in the long run. COIN now had a doctrinal and an operational home in a separate command, but this reorganization separated it even further from the regular forces that resented the new command and the resources it took from them.

The end of the Cold War might have created an incentive for change, but the first major conflict in the new era seemed to confirm the U.S. commitment to conventional warfare. The American-led coalition drove the Iraqi armed forces out of Kuwait in a massive air and ground assault that permanently weakened Saddam's armed forces. Many military officers and outside observers proclaimed not only that Operation Desert Storm vindicated military preparations since the 1970s but also that it exorcised the ghosts of Vietnam as well. Success in the Iraqi desert and subsequent failure in Somalia a few years later reaffirmed the wisdom of preparing for conventional war while avoiding unconventional conflicts. Then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell summed this philosophy up well when asked about the prospect of intervening in Bosnia in 1992: "We do desserts, not mountains."

As a result of this pervasive attitude and the politics of the era, the U.S. military missed an opportunity to reassess world security threats and restructure its forces to meet them. Elected on a domestic political agenda, President Clinton never made defense reform a priority. He did answer popular demand for a peace dividend by downsizing the armed forces

and proceeding with base closures begun under the first President Bush. The military thus became smaller without really changing or, some worried, without reducing its commitments proportionally to troop reductions. With no real pressure to change, the Pentagon dragged its feet on reform and restructuring. The United States finally intervened in the Balkans, first in Bosnia (1995) and then in Kosovo (1999), but those operations proved relatively easy to manage though more protracted than anyone wished. The decade of the 1990s passed as a missed opportunity to be better prepared for what many scholars called the "new world disorder."

Ironically, restructuring only began in earnest as the worst security threat in decades manifest itself on 9/11. Restructuring in the midst of the crisis became somewhat of a liability. Unwilling to devote resources to any operation that would inhibit his ability to downsize and restructure the army, Rumsfeld whittled away at the invasion force, reducing it to the barest minimum necessary to defeat the Iraqi military. That task accomplished, he resisted even maintaining (let alone increasing) the occupation force to deal with the growing insurgency and pressured Paul Bremer to replace American troops with Iraqis as soon as possible.

### The Constitution and American Culture

The experience of Vietnam and the long shadow it cast over the U.S. military notwithstanding, the Constitution and American culture make it very difficult to conduct a protracted unconventional war. Fearful of a standing army in the hands of a powerful central government, the founding fathers divided control of the military between the executive and legislative branches. They made the president Commander-in-Chief but gave Congress the power to declare war and control of the defense budget. This arrangement makes it very hard to wage a protracted war without substantial political support, especially with the entire House of Representatives and one third of the Senate up for reelection every two years. Only with the very survival of the nation at stake will that support be forthcoming. Even then, maintaining political will has presented challenges. Abraham Lincoln faced continuous problems in prosecuting the war to preserve the union. U.S. involvement in the First World War lasted less than a year. The sneak attack on Pearl Harbor followed by Japanese and German declarations of war made World War II a crusade against brutal dictatorships. The Korean Conflict lasted three years. Public support for the Vietnam War remained relatively high for the first three years of that conflict (1965–68), about the same length of time it has taken support for the Iraq war to wane.

Prevailing American values also make COIN difficult. A low-context culture emphasizes directness to the point of being rude. Combined with

ethnocentrism and xenophobia, this attitude complicates interaction with other cultures. Emphasis on metrics as the best means to measure effectiveness and insistence on immediate results has made America and its institutions impatient and prone to quick-fix solutions. A social system based on meritocracy tends to produce rigidly hierarchical institutions in which orders flow down a chain of command far more readily than feedback flows up. It also encourages micromanagement as those at the top presume to know more about the jobs of their subordinates by virtue of having done them, however long ago.

## LEARNING FROM THE PRESENT AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

None of these impediments to learning and practicing effective COIN have proven insurmountable. American soldiers and Marines have adapted quite well to the challenges of Iraq as has the institutional military, albeit belatedly. Many valuable lessons have been learned from the first year of the war. These lessons have been incorporated into doctrine and training and have impacted institutional culture, a least in the short run. How Iraq affects the U.S. military in the long term remains to be seen. American history suggests two possible impacts the war may have. The military may turn its back on the experience as it did following Vietnam, concluding that COIN can never be and should never be its proper function. The Pentagon may, however, take the experience of Iraq to heart and prepare American servicemen and women to fight both conventional and unconventional conflicts. If they adopt that course, the war offers some definite lessons, but also some pitfalls to be avoided.

### Two-Speed Soldiers

The U.S. military has long resisted training what other armies refer to as "two-speed soldiers." Because the American armed forces enjoy the luxury of specialization, they have resisted using troops for any but their primary task. The highly technical nature of modern warfare makes this attitude understandable. Commanders fear that performing other duties takes time away from training on complex weapons systems, such as the Abrams main battle tank, and reduces soldiers' proficiency in using them. While this argument has some validity, it provides a convenient way of avoiding tasks the military simply does not wish to do. The decision to treat COIN as a specialty confined to the SOF community reinforces this tendency. Unfortunately, a protracted COIN campaign in a country as large and populous as Iraq requires a large number of foot soldiers to clear and occupy insurgent areas. The death-before-dismount attitude of

some armored units initially limited their effectiveness as infantry in Iraq. However, the ability of ordinary soldiers from gunners to clerk typists to become effective COIN soldiers demonstrates that specialization need not erode basic infantry skills and vice versa. The Army and Marine Corps can, however, eliminate the wasteful period of adaptation that occurred during the first year in Iraq by institutionalizing the concept of the two-speed soldier.

### Education and Training

The military has done an impressive job revamping its training for the challenges of COIN in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has also produced the first comprehensive COIN manual since the Vietnam War. Whether these changes represent more than an effort to backstop current operations remains to be seen. The U.S. military will never be able to devote the bulk of its attention to unconventional war, but it should not ignore this vital area of contemporary conflict to the degree that it did during the previous 30 years. COIN must become a regular feature of education and training for all soldiers and Marines.

### Special Forces

Preparing the military as a whole for the challenges of irregular conflict does not preclude having some soldiers specialize in this area of warfare. The Pentagon has drawn heavily on Special Operations Forces for direct action in Afghanistan and Iraq while calling upon them to engage in covert operations and advisory missions around the world. SOCOM numbers almost 50,000 military personnel, but the elite Navy Seals and Army Special Forces Groups make up a small percentage of these totals as do the two regular Army CA battalions.[4] The Marines are in the process of creating their own branch SOCOM, which will further augment overall SOCOM capability. Although SOCOM has increased in strength steadily over the past few years, the elite units, those most heavily committed to direct action, should be augmented further. The number of CA units in both the regular and reserve component should also be increased to meet the growing demand for them.

### Iraq as the New COIN Model

The old adage that "nothing spoils like success" applies to military affairs as much as it does to other human endeavors. Far too often strategists treat a past victory as a template for future success. The enormous challenges the armed forces have faced and overcome in Iraq could easily

make them complacent about what they have learned, especially if they fixate on tactics at the expense of operational and strategic lessons. Study of COIN campaigns yields broad principles that must be adapted to the unique circumstances of each conflict. Enshrining any campaign strategy as the blueprint for operational success in future wars inevitably leads to failure.

## THE PHOENIX OF INSURGENCY

Whatever the U.S. military decides to do with the experience of Iraq, one thing remains certain. It will face insurgencies and insurgent-type conflicts for the foreseeable future. No Fulda Gaps loom on the horizon, and for every Desert Storm, a dozen Iraqs, Afghanistans, Somalias, and Kosovos will confront American soldiers. However the Iraq war ends, it would be most unfortunate if the conflict did not help this generation of soldiers and Marines better prepare the next generation for this most challenging and persistent type of warfare.

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

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## CHAPTER 1

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